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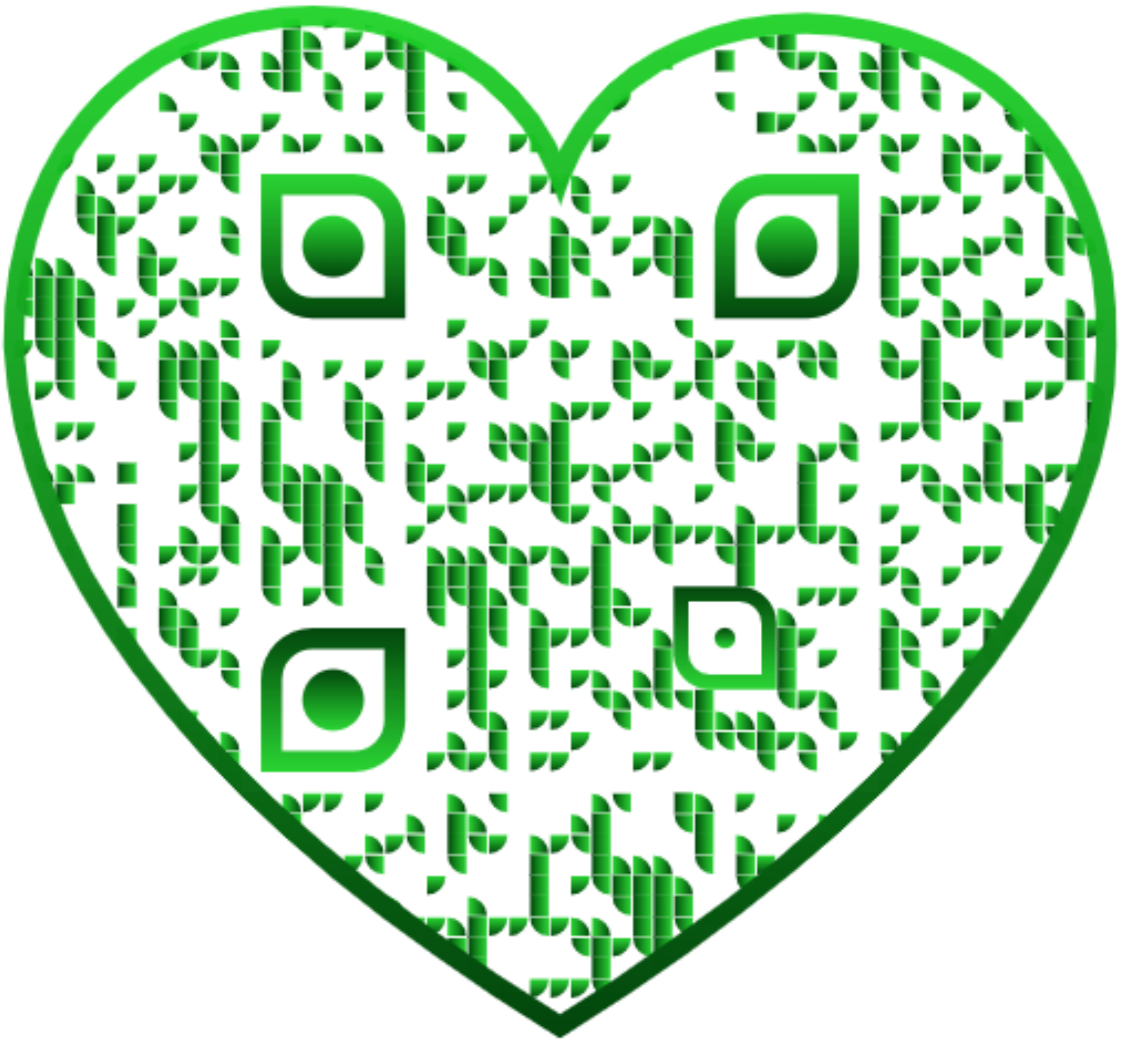

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FROM ONE COLLECTOR TO ANOTHER...

Wrapping Up Two Years

Well, this issue wraps up our first two years of publishing Collectible Guitar – Then & Now magazine. It is pretty cool to think that we have produced twelve issues already.

As you might expect we need to thank our writers who give so freely of their time and knowledge, the folks involved in our distribution, the advertisers who help keep the lights on at the office, and of course – you the readers!

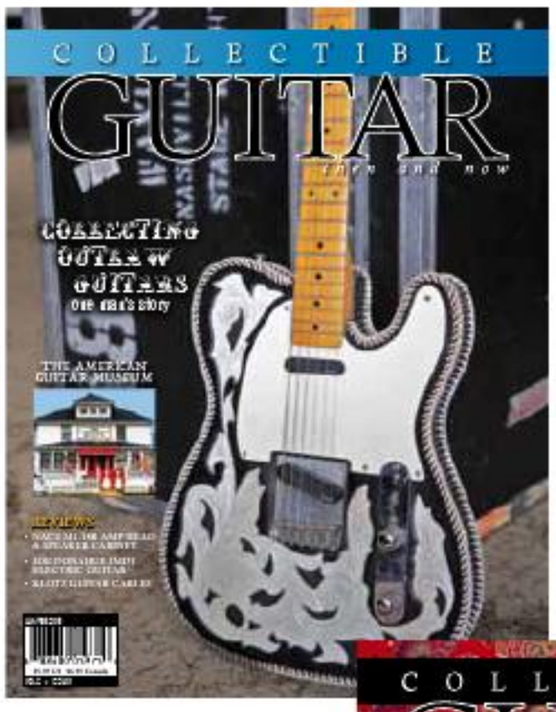
A large majority of our subscribers have asked for back issues (that is a very nice compliment to us) and we have run out of some of those back issues but we will continue to share the ones we do have with our readers. They are $5.00 each plus $2.50 postage etc. (Canada is a little higher). It is neat to think that some of you guitar collectors are collecting our magazines as well.

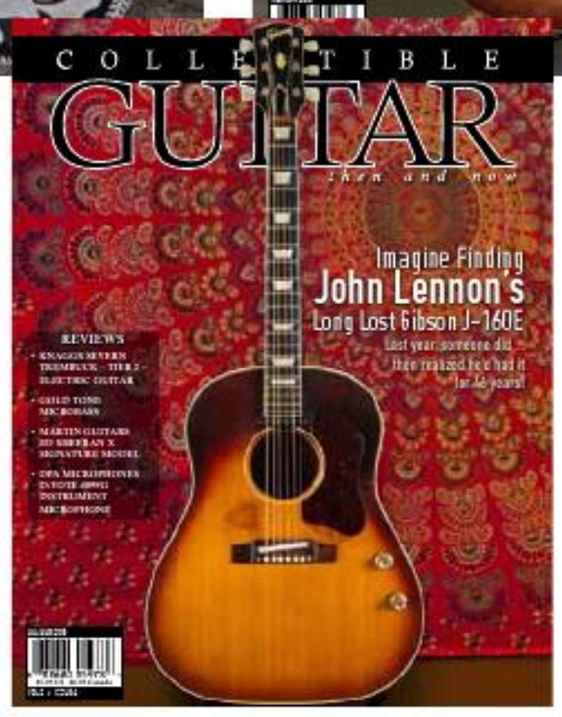
As for year three, we already have some good ideas in the works, and as publisher I am always amazed at what stories seem to come our way.

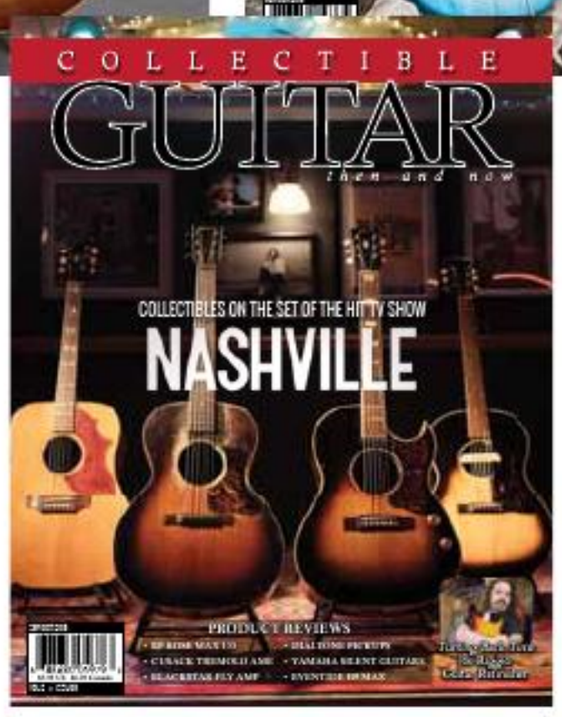
If you are reading this and are not yet a subscriber, please consider joining this community of "guitar people helping guitar people". Your subscription makes a positive contribution to what we are trying to build here at *Collectible Guitar* magazine. We like to have a good time too while pursuing our passion of all things guitar – then and now!

Thank you for your support!

Bruce & Judy







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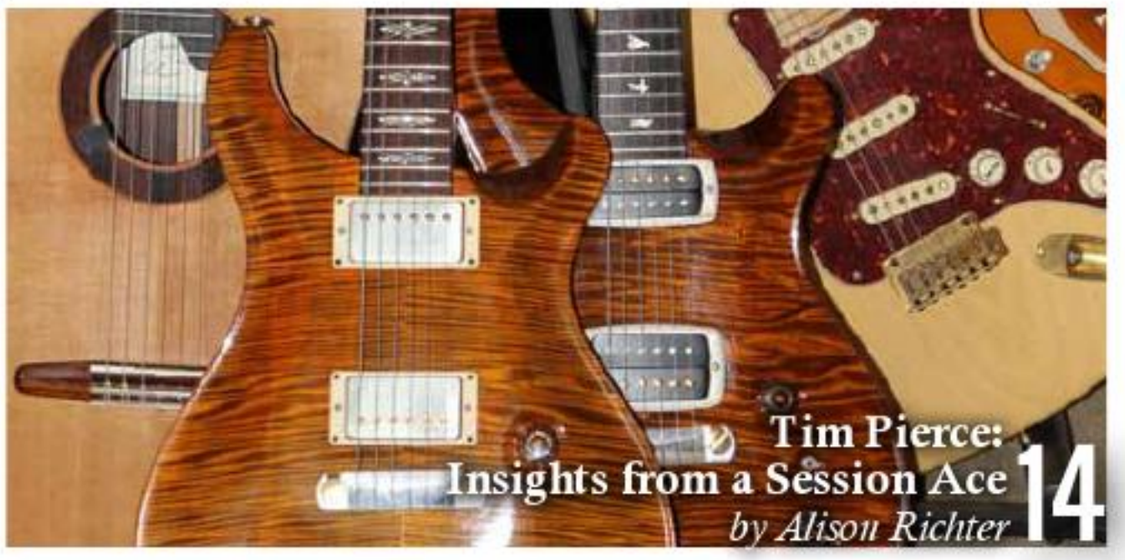

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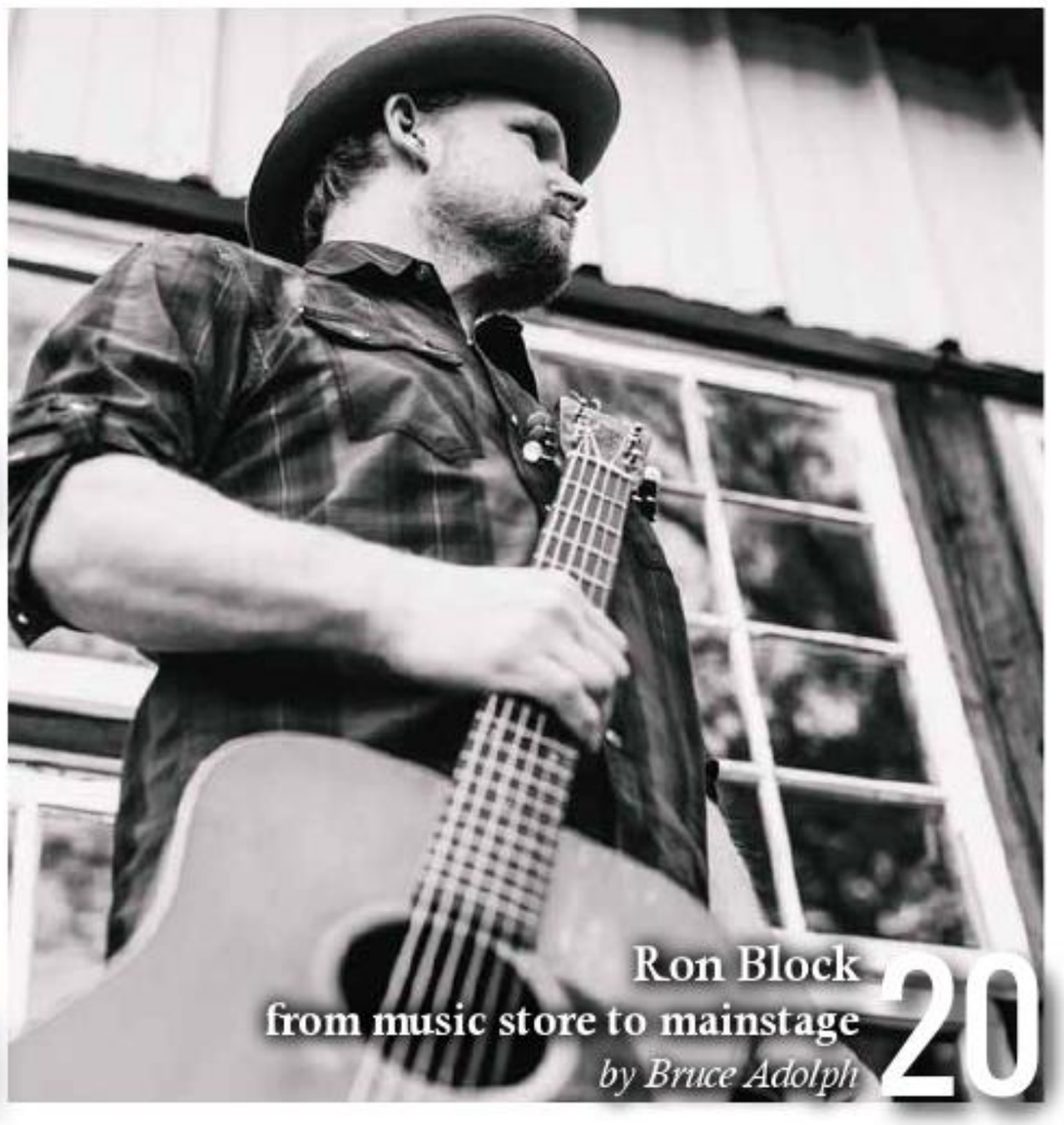

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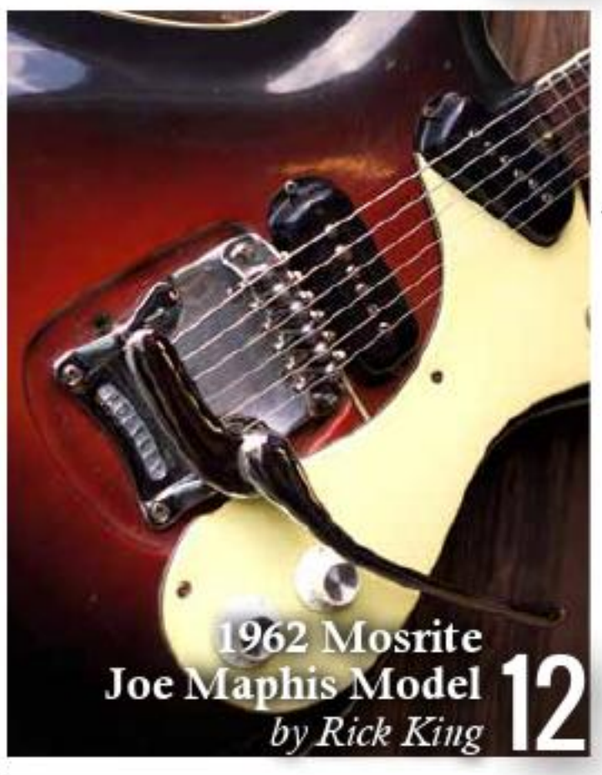

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PRODUCT REVIEW

Vintage and Vintage Icon Guitars - British Invasion

by Eric Dahl

Many musicians are on a tight budget but are still seeking tonal diversity at a price that won't over extend their wallets. Luckily the Vintage and Vintage Icon brands are finally entering the U.S. market thanks to a new U.S. distribution partnership. The big name behind these brands is music gear mastermind Trev Wilkinson, known for his development of the Wilkinson nut, locking tuners, bridges, and pickup coil splitters. Trev is the guitar guru with John Hornby Skewes & Co. Ltd. (a popular U.K. music company that is known as JHS) as they advance their Fret-King, Vintage, and Vintage Icon lines. The guitars are designed in England and many share a striking resemblance to other popular American made guitars, but with modern Wilkinson inspired advancements. Some are crafted in the U.K., but the Vintage series is imported and can be purchased at a fraction of the cost. The instruments I was sent for review were the Vintage V6HMRSB (strat style) $379, V58JDAB (tele style) $499, and a V100MRTSB (Les Paul style) $469.

The Vintage V6 features a one piece alder body, maple neck with rosewood fretboard, EZ Lock tuners, two single coils, and a humbucker in the bridge, with 1 volume knob, 2 tone knobs, and a 5-way selector. What really sets it apart is its "distressed" finish, which is typically referred to as "reliced" in the states. The Vintage Icon series is just distressed enough to look and feel like a well broken in guitar without going over the top, and it sounds great!

The V58JDAB is one of several Jerry Donahue signature models with the company. This guitar has an alder body, maple neck and fretboard, deluxe Wilkinson tuners and bridge, 2 custom single coil pickups, and a 5-way selector, per Jerry's request. The Donahue model is visually stunning and the 5-way really broadens your options compared to a typical 3 way on a tele.

Finally, the V100MRTSB has the look and feel of well-worn rock and roll and like the V6, it also has the "distressed" finish. The V100 has a mahogany body and neck with a rosewood fretboard and maple cap on the top of the body. It is a set neck guitar with Wilkinson deluxe tuners, tun-o-matic bridge, two humbuckers, two volumes, two tones, and a 3-way pickup selector. The unique neck cutaway on the back of the guitar makes playing solos in the upper register easier also. I was told by a JHS representative that the Lemon Drop model in this series is one of their top sellers.

All three of these instruments provide great instrument value at a budget friendly price. If you're looking to broaden your sounds for the next gig but can't invest in the vintage guitar of your dreams, then the Vintage Icon series is well worth consideration. Not all of the JHS guitars are available yet in the States, but as U.S. distribution increases expect to see more musicians playing them here.

www.fretking-vintage.com

Eric Dahl resides in Nashville TN with his wife and daughter. He is the author of "B.B. King's Lucille and the Loves Before Her" and he does a weekly TV gear review show called the FOX 17 Rock and Review.

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QUIRKY VINTAGE

by Bob Cianci

1958 Supro Belmont

This issue's quirky vintage guitar really isn't that quirky. It's just a very cool piece from my collection, a 1958 Supro Belmont purchased several years ago from a teenager in Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey.

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of this guitar and its acquisition, let's examine a short history lesson on the National/Valco Company of Chicago, USA, makers of this pawnshop prize. For a more lengthy history of National/Valco, check out the numerous articles online, but there's a particularly good one on the website www.oldfrets.com.

The National String Instrument Company was founded in 1927 by three Czech-born Dopyera brothers, John, Rudy and Louis, inventors of the resonator guitar and Dobro. Based in Chicago, also the home of Kay and Harmony guitars, National had a checkered history and finally reorganized under the name Valco in 1942, a combination of the names of the new owners, Victor Smith and Al Frost. Louis Dopyera was also a partner. The Supro brand made its debut in the mid-'30's as Valco's budget line, selling lap steels, guitars and those legendary Supro amps everyone seems to want these days. In the 50's the Belmont was meant to go head-to-head with Gibson's Les Paul Junior, a stripped-down student model, and it cost less than a Gibson, a boon to the budget-minded.

And now, back to the story at hand.

After finding the kid's house, I looked the guitar over, quickly deduced it wasn't working properly, that it needed a setup, electronics work and more, which led me to the conclusion he was sadly mistaken if he thought I'd pay $500, his asking price.

I said to him, "The pickup doesn't work, the knobs aren't original, the tuning gear buttons are trashed and rotten, the strings are rusted, it needs a setup, and the wooden bridge is cracked and has to be replaced. I'll give you $300. This guitar needs serious work."

He admitted I was right and counter-offered $350, which I refused. He also told me that the guitar had been in a flooded room for a few days, although not submerged.

It's amazing how people change their minds when you flash three crisp $100 bills in their faces. The Belmont was mine.

A few weeks later, the guitar took a trip with me to the Jersey Shore for some much needed TLC from my friend and luthier David Petillo, who, along with his father, the late Phil Petillo, did whatever it took to get my Belmont up and running. They rewired the guitar from top to bottom (it was completely roached out), replaced the slide switch and found a metal bridge with adjustable saddles that worked perfectly. Father and son decided to leave the old gear buttons on because they still worked, albeit with some effort. The serial number indicated 1958 as the year of manufacture. It was set up with string high for use as a dedicated slide guitar, but the action could be easily lowered with a few turns of the thumb wheel screws on the bridge.

The Belmont has a 25" neck scale. The single cut body appears to be mahogany, covered by red plastic sheeting, and it sports a half inch bevel on the top left. This plastic wrap is similar to the material used to cover drums. National always liked using plastics on their guitars, as evidenced on their higher priced "Map" guitars. There is also a beautiful rosy pinkish/red mother of pearl wrap used on Belmonts at that time that is just stunning to behold. The red covering on my Belmont has worn off on the lower body curve, indicating it was probably played extensively by someone sitting. Missing plastic is a chronic problem with these guitars.

The neck is one of the most comfortable I have ever played; it's sizeable and chunky, but with its pronounced V shape, is extremely playable and a nice fit for someone with small hands. As mentioned, this guitar was made primarily for kids. The neck is painted gloss black. The twenty frets are vintage small, the nut appears to be real bone, and the tuning pegs (still with the rotten, partially dissolved buttons) are Kluson Deluxe. The headstock is a classic "Gumby" design. The Supro nameplate is still on there, beautify rendered in an Art Deco motif with the famous lightning bolt under the name.

The single pickup is what makes this guitar a virtual fire-breathing dragon. Although it looks like a humbucker, in reality it is a large single coil pickup, and it's hot and nasty, although I don't know its Ohm rating. National pickups have a well-earned reputation among collectors and guitarists for raucous goodness, and this one is no exception.

continued on page 48

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THE ONE THAT DIDN'T GET AWAY

by Rick King

1962 Mosrite Joe Maphis Model

photos by Joe Riggio

Let me know if you have heard this one before…

I am actually re-telling a story that I told to Deke Dickerson and it appears in his awesome book "The Strat in the Attic: Thrilling stories of Guitar Archeology". I first met Deke in 1991 when his Columbia Missouri surf-rock band The Untamed Youth, was on their first West Coast tour. The band stopped into my store, Guitar Maniacs, in its early years. The Untamed Youth, though from Missouri, seemed a part of a secret mafia that included bay area bands like the Mummies, the Phantom Surfers and their friends, and even Tacoma's own Girl Trouble. These bands seemed to share a spirit that existed in the early 60's in the great Pacific Northwest. I will never forget their first visit. All of a sudden the entire band disappeared, forgetting that they left their amazing bass player, Mace (Steven Mace) behind at the store. I say amazing because I saw him play a show one time using a Danelectro Silvertone Bass all night, without a strap. They returned later from a Tacoma favorite, Frisco Freeze, a local burger joint since 1955, and Mace was happy.

Deke Dickerson is more than just a guitar nut. He is truly a historian, especially with his knowledge of guitar builders of the West Coast and beyond. I have learned so much from him and he has been so giving of his knowledge. We both are true maniacs when it comes to Semie Moseley built guitars. When Deke is on tour or visiting in my area he stops by the shop. Deke shares my appreciation of the deranged guitar, whether it's a newly acquired 60's Thomas guitar or a guitar that was built by a crazy young scientist. We can talk about them for hours, but with his busy schedule, he never has enough time.

Here's the story I told Deke about acquiring the '62 Mosrite

Affordable Guitars is a cool guitar shop located in a house in Sumner, WA. The owner Kevin and I did not hit it off so well in the beginning, and I guess in retrospect I wasn't very fair. Kevin came in to my store when I was packing for an out of state guitar show. I can't remember which one. He showed interest in a Maui Blue Telecaster I had

in stock. He asked the price and I told him that I was planning on selling it at the guitar show. He asked me again my price on it. I can sometimes be a jerk. This time I was because I would not give him a price and he walked out of the store, not to return until many years later. A friend we shared, Ron, reminded me years later what I had done to Kevin. I got in my car and drove to meet Kevin to apologize. Kevin told me that it was OK, but he really still wanted that Tele. Over the years he has called me for questions or to see what's up with my inventory, or I have called him in reciprocation. I consider Kevin to be a friend. Kevin called me to tell me about a Mosrite Joe Maphis Model he had just gotten in. I can't recall how long it's been, probably quite a few years. My memory gets shorter the older I get! I told Kevin that I wanted it. My mind envisioned a mid-late 60's hollow-body version of the Joe Maphis Model, so I wasn't as eager as I probably should have been.

The exchanges went on for over a year, me calling Kevin, he telling me to come and take a look, or he calling me looking for a Guild acoustic, but reminding me to come and look at the Mosrite. Over a year passed and out of the blue I stop into his shop. He pulls out a dusty case from underneath a ledge. I immediately recognized the case to be of the very early 60's Mosrite variety. Upon inspection it is exactly what I hoped it was. A 1962 Mosrite Joe Maphis Model. The only modification was the bridge and tailpiece configuration. It had been equipped with the mid-60's Moseley Vibrato and Ventures-type roller bridge. I was so excited to get this guitar. I think I traded a blonde 1968 Gibson J-200 for it. We were both very happy with the deal. If you ever visit Sumner, WA, stop in to see Kevin at Affordable Guitars.

Rick King is the owner of Guitar Maniacs in Tacoma Washington. He lives in Gig Harbor with his wife Sheila, two dogs and a cat. Contact Rick: rickking58@gmail.com

TIM PIERCE:
Insights from a Session Ace

by Alison Richter

photos by Nigel Lundemo

If you have owned, purchased, or listened to music during the past 35 years, chances are good that guitarist Tim Pierce is part of the recording. Pierce is one of the industry's most prolific and in-demand session guitarists; his discography includes Elton John, Phil Collins, Rod Stewart, Madonna, Shinedown, Rascal Flatts — the list is endless, with over 1000 titles, and across all genres. He has also worked on countless film and television soundtracks.

Pierce grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He fell in love with music at a young age and was enamored with the now classic rock bands, as well as the pop music he listened to on the radio. He took guitar lessons for two years, played in bands, and aspired to become a studio musician. At 21, he moved to Los Angeles and quickly found work in his chosen field. Sessions with Rick Springfield led to becoming part of the touring band for several years; the two remain friends to this day.

Despite massive cuts in recording budgets, and technology making it easy for artists to work on their own, Pierce is still on the A-list when it comes to session work. He is on call every day, tracking mostly from his home studio, as well as onsite for album projects. He is also involved in instructional projects.

"When I started looking at the next chapter of my life, I knew that I would become some kind of guitar educator, because I taught private students when I was a teenager and when I was 25 and I really enjoyed it," he says. "I felt like I learned more than the students did. I thought, 'This is something I can do when the phone stops ringing — and it will eventually.' The Internet has made it harder for musicians and artists in a lot of ways, but it has made it easier to teach on a much larger level. I'm working on some products, and I'll have a video out soon. I'm excited about that being part of my journey."

You say you learned more than the students learned. Can you elaborate on that?

If a student asks me about a certain style that I have only touched upon, or a certain problem that they're having that I didn't expect, I have to learn it to work it out. I think every teacher discovers this. I think it's one of the reasons people love teaching so much, because in learning to teach it, you're learning it yourself and it's often a new thing.

My enthusiasm for this is based in part on having a career that very few people have. I think I can offer something simpler and more practical than some of the instruction they get. Typically, when I sit down with a student, it almost becomes like physical therapy at first. I'm always correcting some bad habits that they have. I think I can offer something legitimate and genuine because I've had access to playing guitar with singers and artists. I know that there might be a role

for me in teaching people who want to use the guitar to make music, rather than to be the next Eric Johnson.

In previous interviews you've stated that Jimi Hendrix was your catalyst for playing guitar. What was it about Hendrix in particular?

I was born in 1958, and the world to me at that point was an infinite kaleidoscope of possibilities. I loved Eric Clapton, Johnny Winter, ZZ Top, and all the blues-based guitar players. Instead of everything being three-dimensional, Hendrix's music was six-dimensional. It was sounds and colors and every shade of color. You had bands that maybe had six colors, if I can describe it that way. He was using sixty colors. All the shadings in his tone and the elastic nature of the way he pushed and pulled — it was a life-changing experience for me, and I think it was that way for a lot of guitar players. The compositions, these beautiful, delicate, sensitive ballads and really heavy songs — he had it all. More than that, there was a spirit going through him that was otherworldly.

You also had a passion for the Top 40 music you grew up with. Are those sounds and styles applicable to what you do today?

Yes, they are. I don't know where guitar is in the minds of the people who hire me at this point, and the truth be told, I'm not really in the pop music business anymore. I kind of exist in this independent zone that's just to the side of the actual pop music industry, because pop music changed. It became more about celebrity. The actual engine behind pop music is now the laptop, so the guitar got removed from the equation. It gets brought back in as a seasoning and a special event. Now, that being said, you can take a guitar style from any decade and make it applicable to music right now, and that is a great thing, so the answer is absolutely yes. When somebody wants a guitar part, they might want it to sound like an early '70s Queen thing, or a Nile Rodgers thing, or Glen Campbell's "Wichita Lineman," so all those styles become an encyclopedia that people draw from and it's all fashionable. But the guitar comes in and out of style.

What are some of your favorites guitars and studio go-to instruments?

I have a lot of Gibsons and Fenders, but when I do session work, I work at a very accelerated pace. I have seven Gibson Les Pauls, but sometimes I don't pick up a Les Paul because I can't spend the time retuning the G string all the time. When I play, for whatever reason, I knock Gibsons out of tune with my right hand and my left hand. It's just the way I play. So for session work I rely on boutique guitars, and I have bought them from Paul Reed Smith, Michael Tuttle, Tom Anderson, Don Grosh, Bill Nash, and Grover Jackson. I have one amazing, high-end, boutique acoustic guitar that was built by Butch Boswell in San Luis Obispo.

I love vintage guitars, but because of what I do for a living, I've had to rely on guitars that have the vintage aesthetic with all the benefits of new technology. In the last five years, with pickup winding and finishes and everything that's great about vintage guitars, and even pedals and amps, builders and manufacturers have worked hard to bring that

aesthetic back into the new gear, and I'm totally satisfied with it. I like paying a reasonable price for a guitar that's new and a fresher grade, in tune, and intonates well. I have some vintage guitars, but they don't stay in tune as well, and some of them have issues that you can't change because you reduce the value of the guitar. I have about seventy guitars. For me, they are tools. I am much more comfortable paying $3000 for a guitar than $30,000, so I have a lot of reissues. I bought three beautiful vintage guitars from John Shanks about a year ago. They're hand-me-downs. I have great old acoustics. I have a 1948 Martin, a 1965 Martin, and a 1958 National. Those are hand-me-downs from friends.

When did you begin collecting?

When I first moved to L.A. in 1980, you could show up at the studio with one guitar and one amplifier. At some point in the '80s there began an obsession with vintage gear and having all of these different types of guitars. As a studio musician, the gear arsenal became part of what you offered. They wanted you to show up with a truck with a giant pallet of guitars, so that if someone said, "Do you have a Fender Jaguar?" you said, "Yes, got it right here." When I got busy doing session work, probably in 1990, everybody was in a mad dash to have as much gear as they possibly could, and it never stopped. You couldn't have too many, and for different reasons. You would go in the studio and you'd audition guitars. I did a record with a particular artist, we found a guitar part that she liked, and she wanted to hear it on every guitar I owned. You wanted to show up with everything because the worst feeling in the world was for someone to say, "I hear a Danelectro Baritone on this," and if you didn't have it, you felt sick to your stomach.

If you could only bring one guitar and one amp to a session, what would you choose?

I would have to choose two, and it's very easy. If you bring a Gibson Les Paul and a Fender Stratocaster, you're covered. I bring boutique versions of those two guitars because they stay in tune better and the frets are great. This might sound like heresy to a lot of guitar players, but that's just who I am. I would bring my Divided By 13 RSA 23 amp head and my 112 cabinet. Because budgets are so lean, I'm asked to bring my gear in my car when I go to studios these days, so I bring a Stratocaster guitar, a Les Paul guitar, my RSA 23 head, a 112 Bogner-style cabinet, a small pedalboard, and an acoustic. That's all you need. I can't stress it enough. The pedalboard is always different because stuff gets spread around, but right now I use a new Dunlop volume pedal, a [signature] Rockett overdrive pedal, a Nobels ODR-1 overdrive, a Strymon reverb and a Strymon tremolo, a Memory Man, and a Line 6 Echo Park delay because it sounds lo-fi. I have two pedalboards that travel with me and a very large pedal array that stays at home. At home I use a really great overdrive, the Custom Audio Electronics Boost Line Driver. I like overdrive pedals that are not distortion pedals, but that simply explode the front end of the amp. They sound very natural. I love Strymon effects. That's a very good example of a company that combines the vintage aesthetic with everything that's great about modern technology. There's a Leslie pedal that I love called the Ventilator. The DigiTech Whammy and the Electro Harmonix MicroSynth and POG are great effects pedals too. I also have pedals by Way Huge. I'm just giving you the essentials.

You once said that the acoustic guitar was always harder than the electric for you. How so?

As a kid, it was easier for me to do a lot more on the electric guitar. The action is lower and the strings didn't hurt as much. I'm very good at strumming the acoustic guitar, but I'm not the best fingerpicker in the world. I have a style that works, and people are patient enough that they allow me to work my way through fingerpicking, but strumming is my best suit. When Don Was hires me, he almost always has another guitar player do the electric solos. Although I do some electric solos for him, the reason he has me in the room is because he likes the way I strum an acoustic guitar. Extracting a tone from an acoustic guitar is an amazing thing. You have to have a lot of strength, and at the same time you have to have a very light touch because your hands will clamp down and cramp up. Just connecting all the notes, changing chords without a gap between chords, on the acoustic guitar is a phenomenal skill. It's a difficult instrument for me to play, but not a difficult one for me to strum.

Your goal when you moved to Los Angeles was to be a studio musician. Within a matter of years, the session players you admired became your colleagues.

Yes. Almost every person that I saw on albums when I was growing up, I ended up meeting and working with, one after the other. I'd be in the room with Peter Cetera, Tina Turner, Bruce Springsteen, Steve Lukather. I was a huge Kenny Loggins fan, and in the '80s I ended up working with him on five or six of his records. I couldn't believe that it was happening. I was a huge fan of Three Dog Night, and these days Chuck Negron comes over and we do his songs. Last year I did a Neil Diamond record with Don Was. Neil Diamond was the

continued on page 32

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ALL ABOUT AMPS

with Skip Simmons

Q&A

Hello Skip,

I recently bought a used, late model Chinese Vox AC15c1. The amp is in both cosmetically and functionally new condition with this exception: The master volume knob has absolutely no resistance when turning it. It is not the chicken head knob loose on the pot shaft or the pot housing itself being loose. I can turn the knob with a feather AND YET IT WORKS! WITHOUT ISSUE! Should I worry about this?

Thank you,

Barry

Hello Barry: As long as the pot works, you are certainly safe to use it. I have noticed this before; compared to an old pot, many current-production units have VERY little turning resistance. Be gentle with the controls and switches.

Hi Skip,

I dig your articles in Collectable Guitar. Keep 'em coming. I'm compelled to send you a few topics to discuss after your piece "State of The Amp" in Sept/Oct '15 CG. Here's a question/topic or two for you to consider in your column.

I'm a player and my dream of building a "worthy collection" of amps and guitars is on the bottom of the bucket these days--however my wife disagrees with that statement. Therefore:

1) Should I have my amp Tech "tweak" my 1974 Marshall MKII 50 watt head or leave it "original" because it's a 42-year-old Marshall, made in England, in very good to excellent shape? I want to modify the tone somewhat by installing a "Hi Cut" knob. I will keep this amp at all cost until I die, period. So my thought is to tweak it to my liking (keeping chassis mods--drilling 2 or 3 extra holes and such down to a minimum), no matter what my drooling bros think.

2) What is your take on some of the less desirable amps from the 40's through the 70's, including some of the early transistor models? For example: '65 Alamo Jet, Oahu, Kay, Harmony (all tubes), transistor Gibson, Kalamazoo, Valco, Univox, etc.? Do you think their value will increase in 10-20 years, or should they be referenced as nostalgic practice or studio amps?

Thanks,

Bayou

Hello Bayou: Normally, here is how I would answer your first question: "Don't mess with it. That is a great amp, but it's too loud for you and mods are unlikely to be satisfying or cost-effective." However, since you will never sell it anyway, here is an idea. You mention wanting a treble-cut, so I assume you are looking to dial back the fierce highs on the bright channel. One reason that the bright channel is so bright is that there is a capacitor on the volume pot that allows high frequencies to zoom past the pot without any attenuation, while the low and middle frequencies are attenuated. In other words, the volume control can set be set to 3, but the highs are always on 10! Having a competent tech remove or change the value of this cap will make a huge difference in the overall brightness of the amp, especially at lower volumes. These minor, reversible tweaks may be just what you are looking for, and since they don't involve drilling holes, it won't affect the value of the amp.

Regarding your second question, I would say that any vintage amp is going to go up in value a bit, and "nostalgic practice and studio amps" are always going to be something a guitar player will want! To me, the only exception would be the budget AC-DC tube amps that don't use a power transformer. You can spot these amps easily; they don't use common tubes like 6V6s and 5Y3s, instead they use tubes with higher numbers like 35W4 and 50C5. I don't see a lot of vintage solid-state amps, but I can tell you that many of them sound great. Old Traynor, Standel, and Kustom solid-state amps are good names to look for.

Dear Skip,

I recently bought a 1959 Tremolux amp that was in pretty beat-up shape. When the seller went to fire it up (it hadn't been used in many years) it played for about 5 seconds and then shut down completely. Not a noise out of it. It turns out that the transformer blew when he turned it on. I had a good repairman install a "vintage/used" transformer that he had and the amp sounded great.

Can you please tell me the pros and cons of using a used transformer versus a new in a vintage amp? Should I get the old transformer rewound for even better performance?

Thanks,

Bruce

Hello Bruce: Fortunately, there are many new transformers available. If the specifications of the original part are met, a new one will work and sound just fine. However, a properly rewound original transformer would add value compared to a replacement, so it is possible that the added expense of a rewind would be an option. I also need to mention that since the amp had not been turned on for many years, taking it to a qualified tech first would have been a better idea than just hitting the switch. It is very likely that the amp had another problem that caused the transformer to fail. If that problem could have been sorted out first, you would not have had to replace the transformer at all. Imagine that you bought a cool old car that had not been run in years. It would be easy to damage the engine if you started it without checking the oil first!

Skip Simmons is a nationally known vintage amp repairman.

He can be reached at SkipSimmonsAmps.com

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Ron Block
from music store to mainstage

by Bruce Adolph

photo by Crystal K. Martel

You may know Ron Block as an American bluegrass and alternative country musician who plays guitar and banjo and writes and sings some great music. He has after all been awarded 14 Grammys, 6 International Bluegrass Awards and a CMA Award. But Ron's story to me is more of a "local-boy-does-good" one. Read on and find out why…

Collectible Guitar: Ron, you and I actually are connected from the past in a unique way that even shows up in the title of your new record. Tell us about the significance of Hogan's House of Music?

Ron Block: My Dad owned a music store for years called Hogan's House of Music, originally in Lawndale, California. He worked for Mr. Hogan a long time and learned the ropes, and when Mr. Hogan died in the late 1960s he left half the store to Dad. Dad bought the other half from his daughter. I grew up with some of my earliest memories being the smell of old guitars, cases, and amps, and guys sitting around playing. At around ten or eleven years old I'd sometimes go there with Dad and my stepbrother to pull weeds in the back, clean cymbals, or other odd jobs. At sixteen I started working there, first as cleaning boy, then as a salesman, and later as the warehouse man. Dad would constantly get used instruments in, and in those days a '64 Strat was "a really nice guitar," not a vintage classic worth a bundle. I remember polishing many a 50's or '60's Les Paul, Strat, Tele, 335 - you name it, I polished it.

The guys there were always playing music, either on the stereo or playing a lick or two on a guitar. I heard a lot of great music, that kind of passionate rock-and-roll, blues, and jazz guitar that hits you below the neck. At the same time I was really immersed in traditional bluegrass - Flatt & Scruggs, Bill Monroe, the Stanley Brothers, Larry Sparks, Jimmy Martin, J.D. Crowe, and other seminal bands and players. Those two streams would seem to clash, but they really didn't in me. When I was about 18 years old I bought a Les Paul, and later a Strat, and I've had these three streams running through my music, all mixing together for years: acoustic guitar, electric guitar, and banjo, and the techniques translate somewhat from one to another. It made me into a banjoist and acoustic guitarist with a traditional bluegrass right hand, yet with sometimes a very string-bending approach.

photo by Crystal K. Martel

CG: I was a manager of a competing music store not very far away from Hogan's House of Music in the South Bay area of California. Even though your family business was about serving local musicians, were there some in your family who were worried about you trying to make a career in music and being able to provide for a family as a musician?

Ron: Some in my family were definitely worried about me not making a decent living, and rightly so. The chances of making a living solely at playing music have always been fairly slim. But there was something in me that couldn't stop - I had to do it. There seemed to be no other option; if I didn't play music for a living, or at least give it my best shot, I would always be wishing I had. The other side of the equation was that my mother raised me to trust in the God of the Bible - the God who takes care of the sparrows, who clothes the lilies. I knew he would take care of my needs if I trusted him and stepped out in faith. My worried family members didn't have a problem with me playing music itself; what they wanted was for me to have "something to fall back on," like a degree in business or something of that nature. Looking back, I can see how that might have been a really good idea. These days I think it's a good policy for any musician to study the business side. But I was vastly idealistic back then, and I really did know I was supposed to play music. It all ended up working out well for me - God did keep those promises. But there were some slim years between about 1984 and 1991, when I joined Alison Krauss & Union Station.

CG: How did joining Alison and the band come about?

Ron: When you play bluegrass you travel around to different festivals and events and run into other bands and players. I met Alison in 1985 or so in Nashville at a bluegrass festival and contest. Over the next few years I'd run into Alison, or Barry Bales, Adam Steffey, Tim Stafford, and Dan Tyminski before any of them were in AKUS, at various festivals, and we'd get together and play. That's all it was, for me - seeing one of them play a show or do a workshop, going up to them afterward and saying how much I loved their playing. That was reciprocated, and of course jamming ensued. The jamming culture in bluegrass really enables a lot of that, and that is how I played with Alison and the future band members long before I was in the band.

Also, I had a way of playing banjo and guitar that sounded different. I think we all loved being rooted in the same music, all the early bluegrass like Flatt & Scruggs, Monroe, Jimmy Martin, the Stanley Brothers, Larry Sparks, and all that, and also the second generation players like J.D. Crowe, Tony Rice, and others. We had similar musical foundations. I was rooted in that older style of banjo and guitar playing, but I had an overlay of electric guitar sensibilities - I bent strings a lot on both banjo and guitar, slid around a lot, and was very syncopated and surprising. So I think the combination of those things drew their attention, plus I could sing harmony, which is always a plus in a band context. When the time came and they needed a banjoist/guitarist/vocalist Alison called me up. I was absolutely thrilled to the clouds to join. My first weekend we did Austin

photo by Rob Webster

City Limits, the televised Grand Ole Opry, and Hee Haw, so it was sink or swim.

CG: Wow. That is quite an amazing first week in the band!

Let's change gears and talk about equipment for a bit. As a magazine we sure appreciate both vintage and boutique guitars, and in your case… banjos as well. Can you tell us about a few of the instruments that you have that might interest our readers?

Ron: My first Martin guitar was a 1969 D-18 I bought from my Dad's store, Hogan's House of Music, back in 1982. It was my lone acoustic guitar for years, and I used it on the first AKUS record I was on, *Everytime You Say Goodbye*. My main recording guitar for the past 13 years has been a 1938 Martin D-28 Herringbone I bought from Rickey Wasson when he still played with J.D. Crowe, back in 2002. I've used it on several Alison Krauss & Union Station records, along with my last two solo records, including the latest, *Hogan's House of Music*, a bluegrass instrumental album. Martin changed the bracing just before it was made, so it has a unique combination of that bracing with a fatter neck. It sounds radically different from the 1937 Herringbone I have that I bought from Dan Tyminski. The '37 has more midrange - it's a killer guitar, and is more the guitar that many bluegrass players would love. I love the '38 better because while it is great for bluegrass, it has a piano-like tone, very evenly balanced from bottom to top. Every note speaks. It's a very easy guitar to play with feeling - it's like it carries its own feeling within the tone.

I also have a 1938 D-18. It's one of the best lead guitars I've ever heard, but it needs some work; the action has come up too much over the last couple of years. I used it a lot in conjunction with the '38 D-28 on my third solo record, *Walking Song*. Another good Martin I've got is a 1946 00-18 - I used it on the AKUS song "Paper Airplane". It's got a sweet small-bodied sound that is perfect for songs like that.

A 1952 Martin D-18 and some newer guitars take care of some of the live situations. It was broken up and put back together before I bought it, and had a pickup in it. I want to get it re-done so that the string spacing is slightly wider like my '38 D28.

For round-neck resonator guitars, I've got a 1930 National Duolian and a 1937 National wood bodied guitar that Mike Dowling put together for me years ago.

For vintage electrics, I have an early 1965 Fender Stratocaster I bought from Gruhn's around 2003 or 2004, and a 1963 Fender Telecaster I bought there as well, a year or so later. The Tele was owned by a guitarist named Steve in a country band from California, I think in the early 70s, and he would have artists sign it. Merle Haggard, Tammy Wynette, Sonny Osborne, Vern Gosdin, Nat Stuckey, Justin Tubb, and others signed it. At first I wished it was original

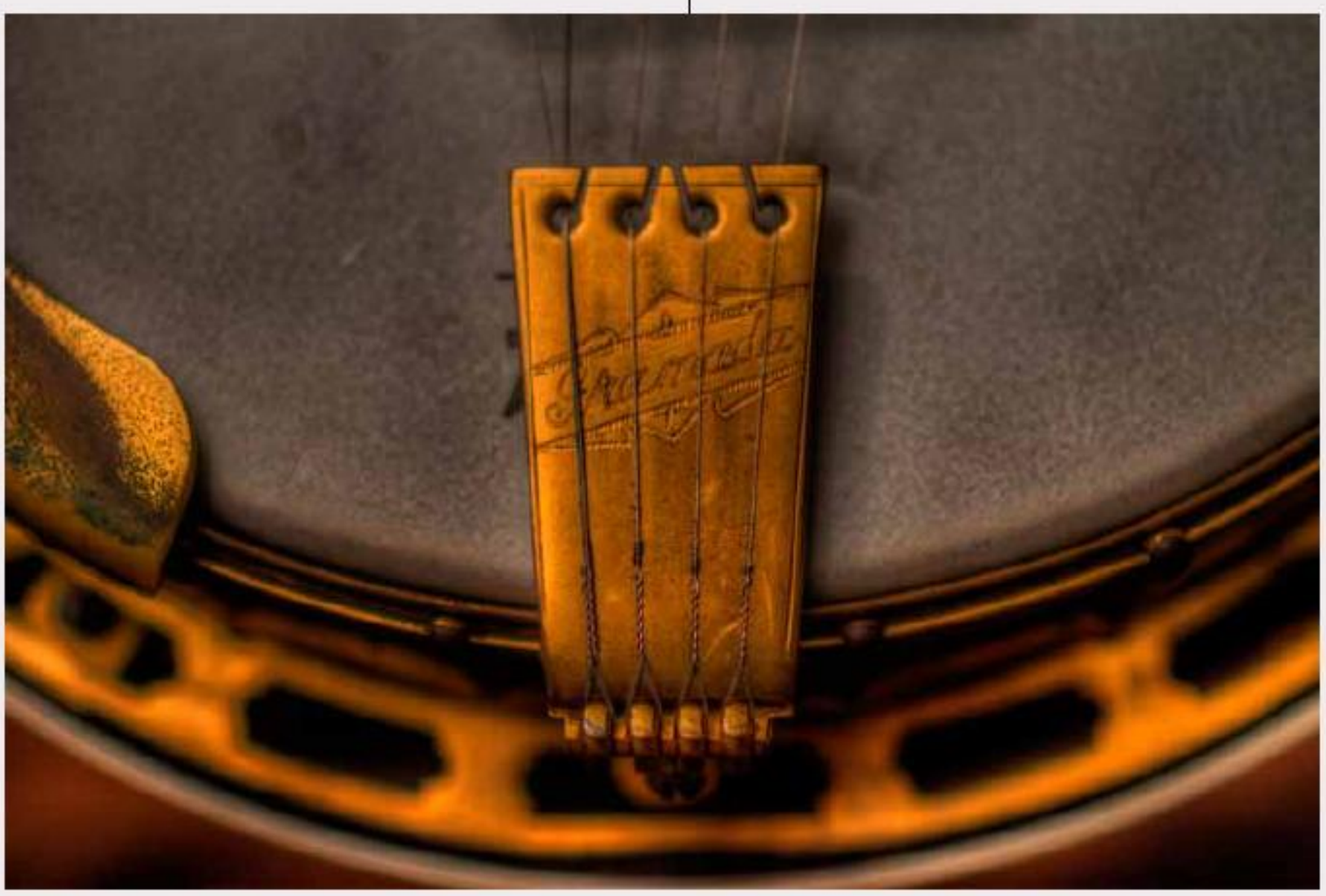

photo by Rob Webster

photo by Ron Block

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Ron with Kate Rusby and Damien O'Kane in England, 2012

without the signatures, but I've really come to love the way it looks. I used it on Alison's *A Hundred Miles or More* CD and on her *Live from the Tracking Room* DVD on the tunes "Simple Life" and "I'm Just a Country Boy", and also on my second solo record. It's a great sounding Tele.

I was at a community pig roast a few years ago, playing with my sister-in-law, and I saw an older gentleman onstage by himself playing what looked like an old Gibson. It turned out to be a Gibson ES-175D. After talking to him, he said to come to his motorhome to play that one and a 1961 Gibson J-45. I'm not one to try to finagle old guitars from people, so I said nothing about wanting to buy them. But as I was leaving the motorhome he said, "You know, I'm thinking of selling these." And I said, "Well, if you decide to, give me first crack at them. Here's my number." He called me a few weeks later. I love both of those guitars. The ES-175 is perfect for jazz guitar or Travis-style picking. I've got a 1957 ES-125 as well that is a really fun guitar.

My only really vintage banjo is a 1926 Gibson Granada I bought from a vintage instrument dealer in southern California in the late 1980s named R.C. Snoddy. Randy was always so good to the bluegrass pickers. I played that banjo at the Grass Valley festival one year, I was around 20 or 21 years old maybe, and Randy said, "Do you like that one?" I said "I sure do." He said, "Well, it's $2500. Take it and pay me whenever you can." It took me a couple of years to pay him off, $100 here, $250 there, but I finally did. It's a real beauty of a banjo, but I need a good neck made for it and some setup.

For the more contemporary guitars, I play a Hayes mahogany D-18 style guitar, a Santa Cruz Ron Block model, a Bourgeois OM, a Bourgeois sunburst Slope-D model, and a Thomas Bazzolo classical, and a Scheerhorn round-neck resonator.

To wrap up on the banjo side of things, I mostly play two Huber Ron Block model banjos. They're maple, and designed to look like my '26 Granada. I've used these on several AKUS records. I did recently see Steve and asked him to make me a mahogany banjo, so that'll be next. The other banjo I have is a Rich & Taylor, which I used on the AKUS record *So Long So Wrong*.

CG: Ron, that is quite an impressive palate of instruments to paint from musically. Just as impressive to me are the folks you have pulled together to play on this new record of yours. First, tell us about the new album, and second, tell us how you utilized this deep roster of musicianship to the benefit of the record?

Ron: I was digging deeply into traditional bluegrass, Flatt & Scruggs, Bill Monroe, Jimmy Martin, and the like, in my teen years. At 16 I began working for Dad's music store, Hogan's House of Music. I began hearing all sorts of music, rock, jazz, blues, and although at the time I was completely immersed in bluegrass and didn't want to listen to anything else, eventually those other sounds began affecting me. I bought a '70s Les Paul and an SG and began messing around. Eventually those passionate sounds of the electric guitar experimentation I was doing began to infuse my banjo and acoustic guitar playing with slidey, bendy ideas. So this record is an acknowledgement of those two sides of influence: traditional bluegrass *a la* Flatt & Scruggs, Jimmy Martin, J.D. Crowe, Monroe, etcetera, and also the bluesier, bendy side of me.

The two main recordings that inspired Hogan's House of Music were Flatt & Scruggs' *Foggy Mountain Banjo* and Jimmy Martin's *Big and Country Instrumentals*. Both have been sources of musical food for me for a long time. I leaned toward the format of the Jimmy Martin record a little more in terms of having varied players on various songs, whereas the lineup for *Foggy Mountain Banjo* was essentially the same throughout.

As for the players, well, I've got friends in high places. Of course I wouldn't do a bluegrass record without recruiting my bandmates from Alison Krauss & Union Station: Barry Bales on stand-up bass, Jerry Douglas on Dobro and Weissenborn, Dan Tyminski on rhythm guitar, and Alison on fiddle. Also, Adam Steffey used to be in Union Station, and I wanted to have that rhythm section - Barry, Dan, and Adam, the players on the AKUS record So Long So Wrong - on several tracks. The other two mandolin players I used were Sam Bush and Sierra Hull, who also played octave mandolin. Sam has long been a hero of mine, and Sierra is a great new-generation player. Stuart Duncan on fiddle is a genius, and Tim Crouch on fiddle played some amazing solos and backup; he also added strings and percussion to several tunes. Clay Hess was another addition that made total sense, another top level guitar player, as was Rob Ickes on Dobro, Byron House and Mark Fain on stand-up bass, Lynn Williams on snare drum, and Jeff Taylor

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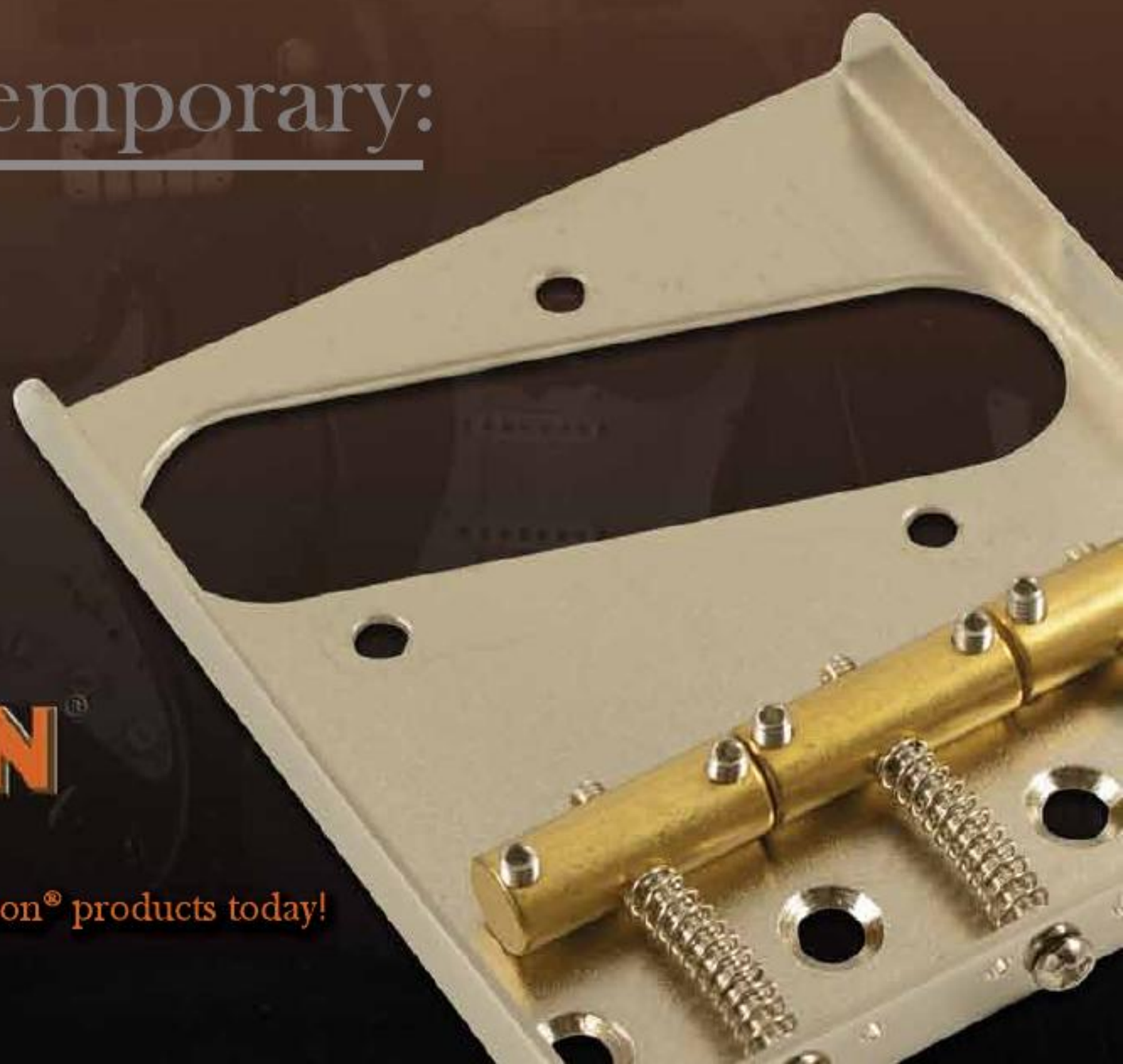

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photo by Crystal K. Martel

on accordion. I did different sessions each day with different mixes of musicians, and had a blast.

CG: I can't even begin to think how much fun (and work) that must have been building this record with such high caliber musicians – who are also your friends! Very well done Ron.

When you are playing live with your acoustics what pick-up systems are you using? And in the studio what mics are your favorite to use?

Ron: I'm currently using the Fishman Aura with a Santa Cruz Ron Block model guitar with a Fishman Matrix pickup, and the same in my Hayes acoustic guitar and my '52 Martin D-18. I'm also experimenting with options to use in conjunction with the Aura on my pedalboard. I've also used the LR Baggs pickups and have them in some of my other guitars. I grew up in a world of bluegrass festivals and concerts where acoustic guitars were miked. These days nearly everyone plugs in, even in bluegrass. As time goes on it becomes increasingly tough to bring my older Martins to a show, because the knowledge of how to mic a guitar in even a smaller room is being lost. It's a bit like using a GPS constantly - eventually you lose your sense of direction and ability to keep a map in your head.

photo by Rob Webster

For my recording setup in my studio, I usually record guitars and mandolin in stereo with two Neumann KM-54s through Mastering Lab pres, a GML eq, and Black Lion converters. For banjo I use a U-67 and a U-87, or one of those and a KM-54. I'll often bring the mics and the Mastering Labs to a session, especially AKUS sessions.

CG: Last question. What advice do you have for other musicians? If you could sit down over coffee and tell a young artists (or in a lot of our readers cases - an older musician :) one thing... what would it be?

Ron: I've done some things right and some things wrong. I've got a lot more advice than to be able to boil down to just one thing! Given the limited space, I will say this: Don't say, "I want to be a professional musician" and then practice for an hour a day. These days there are so many distractions for young people. I had primitive video games, cable television with maybe a hundred channels, and no internet or cell phone. Those were my technological distractions. I said "No" to excessive television and games, and practiced instead. But these days young musicians have cell phones texting, notifying, beeping constantly, and iPads, laptops, cable television with 700 channels, 3D and HD video games that put your mind in the middle of the action. These things are all useful in their proper place. I tell my kids that entertainment is something that one does after working. Watching an hour show at night is fine. But it is up to every one of us to count up the hours we are spending on passive entertainment (I don't include reading books as "passive entertainment").

On the up side, the internet gives vast opportunities for educating yourself. How I wish I had had YouTube, and Amazing Slow Downer back in my teens! The Great Courses, and Coursera, and all kinds of ways of studying music - Berklee Online!

So, to wrap it up, if I had been spending most of my practice time watching television or playing video games in my teens, do you think Alison Krauss would have called me up when she needed a banjoist/guitarist/vocalist and songwriter? I would have been trading a future of musical gold for neon baubles and trinkets in the present. Don't waste time if you want to play music professionally. Work hard at it, and closely monitor your practice time. Keep a practice log. Set long term and short term goals. If you're going to be a musician, be one. Read *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Covey. Read *The War of Art* by Pressfield. Study hard, and love playing and practicing. ◇

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SO YOU WANT TO BE A MUSICIAN

by Michael Elsner

Part 2

In part I of this series (July/August 2015), I answered 4 frequently asked questions that I get asked all the time. This month I want to cover the most important question that I'm asked. That is simply:

"How can I make a living at this?"

Unfortunately there is a common misperception that unless you're a 'famous' musician, you can't make a living and you'll end up sleeping in your parent's basement, or mooching off of your girlfriend (or boyfriend) until you finally get a 'real job.'

The good news is that there are plenty of ways to make a living in music, but generally speaking, most musicians I know need multiple streams of income in order to make that a possibility. Very rarely do I meet a musician who makes his living from one source, although there are a few scenarios where this would be the case.

The first would be a full-time gig with an A-list artist, which often involves a yearly salary and retainer, allowing them to make the artist their priority, much like a typical full time job. For most of us, these are the dream gigs that we aspire to attain. They say there are three elements that make a for a great artist gig: the hang, the music, and the pay. If you have two out of the three, you have a good gig. If you're fortunate enough to have all three, then count your blessings because you've hit the musical lottery.

The second scenario would be for the more established players who've worked their way into becoming a 1st call session musician. This generally involves having a solid playing history, often years refining their skills on the road, as well as having networked into the inner circles of successful producers and engineers.

The third scenario would be a songwriter who writes for a publishing company and is fortunate enough to have multiple cuts each year. Add in a few radio singles and/or Top 10 hits and you may just be buying yourself a 2nd and 3rd home.

These situations do occur, and there are many musicians who work their way into these situations each year, however, for the vast majority of professional musicians, in order to keep the bills paid, we have to juggle the road gigs along with the sessions and maybe some teaching, producing, as well as any other opportunities that come up.

So, where does that leave us? Well, fortunately, the world needs music. With the proliferation of cable TV channels, the variety of new TV series each season, the boom in video games, commercials, etc., there is a constant need for new musical content.

One particular opportunity that I want to present is that of licensing music. If you have a computer with ProTools, Logic, Digital Performer, or any other DAW, and love to write/record your own tracks, there's a multitude of opportunities for licensing your music to various mediums.

There are a wide variety of companies, for example Jingle Punks and Music Dealers, that have licensing deals in place with production companies to provide music for television shows/video games/commercials, etc. Some of these companies allow you to sign up with their service and upload your music to their library. Others require you to reach out them personally, but in general, if the quality of your recordings meets their standards, your tracks will be absorbed and entered into the system, potentially earning you thousands in royalties for years to come. This avenue alone has been my lifeblood for the last 12 years or so. Although I work directly with music supervisors and editors through my production company and publisher, I know many independent artists who have great success working with licensing companies.

If you decide to venture down the road of licensing your music, it pays to learn and understand licensing concepts such as Sync and Master Licenses, Most Favored Nations clauses, as well as Exclusive vs. Non-Exclusive content. I recommend the book *The Musician's Guide To Licensing Music* by Darren Wilsey. This is by far the most thorough book about licensing music that I've read.

I want to give you an exercise to do the next time you mindlessly sit in front of the TV screen. Listen to all the music that is constantly being played in the background. Someone is making money from each performance of those tracks. Theoretically, it's just the same as having a song of yours on the radio, except these tracks have been sync'd to picture, and that requires a license granted from the music creator to the video producer.

Licensing original music is a great extra source of income for many musicians. For those composers who pursue it full-time, licensing their tracks is both a very financially and creatively rewarding career.

Each of these avenues, touring, recording, teaching, writing, licensing, etc. involves a solid investment of your time, and, like anything in the music industry, requires a lot of networking to rise up in the ranks. As I stated in Part I of this series, the best place to start is by moving to a music town and becoming fully invested in the community. If that's out of the question, but 'the dream' is still alive, then there are a plethora of opportunities you still have at your disposal.

More than anything, don't let the naysayers discourage you into believing that if you aren't a famous musician, aren't in a famous band, etc., that you won't be able to provide for yourself or your family. There is nothing more rewarding than pursing and succeeding in what you are passionate about, and there are plenty of opportunities out there to make that dream a reality.

Michael Elsner is a guitarist/songwriter/producer whose written for shows including American Idol, Amish Mafia, EXTRA, The Sing Off, and So You Think You Can Dance among many others.
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THE FRETBOARD LESS TRAVELED

by Rich Severson

Comping the Bebop Blues

For guitar players the blues is the common language we can all speak. How someone plays it says a lot about his musical background and the music he listens to. One thing for sure is that we are all looking for new ideas for blues progressions.

Here is a chord arrangement of a blues progression in a jazz/bebop style, but before we start, let's define the terms of the title of this article. First the "Blues; it's easy to recognize but hard to define. Most of us would agree that 75% of blues is based around 12 bars of music with the 1, 4 & 5 chords of the key. The term "Bebop" is commonly defined as up tempo jazz characterized with improvisation of the melody, solos, and chord changes. Bebop musicians also play ballads and mid-tempo pieces, but all have **improvisation as the focus**. "Comping" is short for accompaniment, the chords and rhythm supporting the melody and improvisation. As a guitar player there are two different approaches to playing the chords to a song. 1st, when playing rhythm guitar you are supplying the rhythm and chords in **consistent patterns**. 2nd, if you are "comping" the chords to the song you are **creating melody** with your chords and interacting with the soloist.

In this chord arrangement the chords above each measure are the ones typically found in a 12 bar blues progression in the jazz style. Above the tab staff is the chords and voicings that a jazz guitarist might play as he interrupts the harmony or re-harmonizes it.

The first half of this piece uses passing chords played with one chord per beat. This is taking the rhythm guitar approach. The second half is taking the "comping" approach and playing more melody with those chords. Both will give you some insights into the bebop / jazz blues style. Maybe you'll find some moves you can use in your own blues playing.

Go to www.99centguitarlessons.com/fbebop/BEBOPCOMPF4.html if you would like to view a demo video of the arrangement. If you would like to know more, you can purchase the complete video lesson with explanations, PDF music, and a practice/performance track there.

'Till next time

Rich

BEBOP BLUES COMPING IN "F"
ONE CHORD PER BEAT + CHORD MELODIES
BY RICH SEVERSON
F7 Bb7 Fmi7 Bb7
F7 Db0 D0 B9 Bb9 A7 Bb7 F#mi9 Fmi9 B9 Bb9 Ebmi9
Dmi7 G7 Cmi7 F7 Bb7 Bbmi7 Eb7
Dmi9 Db9 Cmi9 B9 Bb9 Fmi9 Bb9 Ami7 Bbmi7 Bbmi9 Eb9 Eb13 Ami7
Ami7 D7 Abmi7 Db7 Gmi7
Ami6/9 Ami7 Ami9 Abmi11 B6/9 Db13 Db9 Gmi11 Bb6/9 C13 C9 Db9
C7 F7 D7 G7 C7
C9 C11 C9 F7 Eb7 D7 Ab7 G7 Db7 C7 F#7
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Rich Severson is a guitarist, clinician, author, and former GIT instructor.
To preview Rich's music and guitar educational products go to

www.GuitarCollege.com and www.99CentGuitarLessons.com

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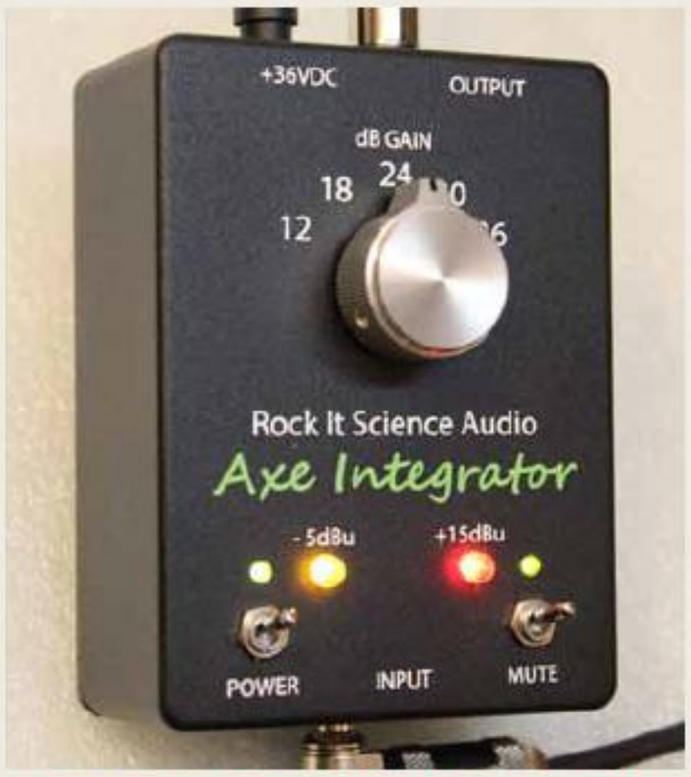

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"Tim Pierce" - continued from page 16

first concert I went to, and if you had told me when I was 12 years old that someday I would be an essential part of his recording process … the same thing with Glen Campbell. It's been the most amazing thing.

You went from studio to touring with Rick Springfield (1983 – 1989) to studio again. How did one prepare you for the next?

When I moved to L.A. I did not have a lot of experience. I started working right away, but there were big gaps in my versatility. I did some pretty big records. I worked on Jon Bon Jovi's first record, which ended up being his first single, "Runaway," before he put his band together. I did a John Waite record that was pretty successful. I worked on a Rick Springfield record because I was working with the producer on something else and I got snuck into the session. At that moment, Rick was the biggest star in America and he was putting a band together. It was a wonderful job. I had never toured before. We were going to travel all over the world, I would get to buy gear, live that life, it was pretty exciting. He believed in me enough to allow me to play guitar on all his records. The artist's band always gets removed from the recording process, but it wasn't that way for me, and I have to thank him for that. I got to do a lot of solos and flashy guitars, so it was a great place for me to fill in some of the gaps in my learning. Rick decided to take a break and I went broke. I started doing publishing demos. I would get paid $100 to do a three-hour demo with the songwriter. I would do two or three of those a day, and that's how I earned my living. I filled in those gaps in my versatility and became more consistent about delivering guitar parts. Rick prepared me by giving me a great job and allowing me to play on his records. When that stopped, I had to earn my living as an independent, and publishing demos taught me how to be a good studio musician. By 1990, I began to work on records. Generally, I was the least-trained musician in the room, but I always tried really hard and did my best and found a way to get through it.

Music is now listened to on earbuds, smartphones, on computers, and of course in cars and on stereos. Is that something you take into consideration when arranging and recording your parts? Personally, does it lessen what you're doing when you know that it's being listened to on a phone?

Yes. Music is not as important today. I think it's more prevalent, it's everywhere, it's being listened to and enjoyed more than ever, but it's not as important in people's lives. That probably would have happened anyway, but the actual issue of low fidelity and the degradation that happens with even the high-quality MP3's … the distorted guitar is a quite beautiful thing when you're listening in a high-fidelity situation, whether it's digital or analog. When a distorted guitar sound becomes an MP3, or the sound that you're listening to when you watch a YouTube video, it gets compressed and reduced. Distorted guitars can sound somewhat hashy and they're not beautiful anymore. I honestly think that's one of the reasons that rock is not quite as popular as it was a few years ago. So I pay attention to how distorted the guitars I'm recording are these days. I try to record them a little cleaner, because I think over time they'll survive better as things get mixed and squeezed down.

Even before MP3s, I noticed that when I played guitar in a session, it would sound glorious, and every time it came to the mix, I was always disappointed. If you put a guitar sound at level 6, it can be amazing, but if you put it at level 4 and a half, it loses everything. Guitar sounds are very sensitive to where they sit in the mix, as far as whether they sound like they're supposed to. I realized that the best sonic version of what I did was going to be the day I did it, and it would never sound that good again. Earbuds on a phone sound great in comparison to a lot of things. Listening to YouTube on your computer speakers — that's disappointing. At least with the earbuds you're hearing full fidelity.

You do a lot of work with John Shanks and Warren Huart, who both have a passion for music that surpasses that of most people. Does it help that they are also guitarists and can speak the language of the instrument?

Absolutely. John has a love of music that is like ten people loving music in one body. It's amazing. I've told him that his love of music and interest in music is astounding. I work with John when it's a situation where he didn't write the song, because when he writes, he creates all the guitar parts. Sometimes he records somebody else's song, and he would rather sit behind the desk and relax and have someone like me do as much heavy lifting as possible. Later that day he can do his thing on it, but at least he has a foundation, because being a producer is such a huge job. He's smart enough to know that he has to step back at the beginning.

Dann Huff is the same way. I work with Dann, and he hires his favorite guitar players to track. He'll overdub after the tracks are done. So here's the thing. You know that you can't fail when you're working for and with somebody like that. You know that they're going to fill in every moment and answer every question for you. They're going to offer you ideas, they're going to offer you suggestions, "Clean that up a little bit," "A little more delay," "A little bit less delay." If you look at it the right way, and I think I always have, it's more fun, it's easier, and it gives you more confidence. You're working with people who can solve every problem and make what you do better, so I love it.

Warren is one of the hardest-working people. Warren does everything. He mixes, he engineers, he records, and I think Warren became an engineer and producer because he became so successful at it, but he was meant to be a guitar

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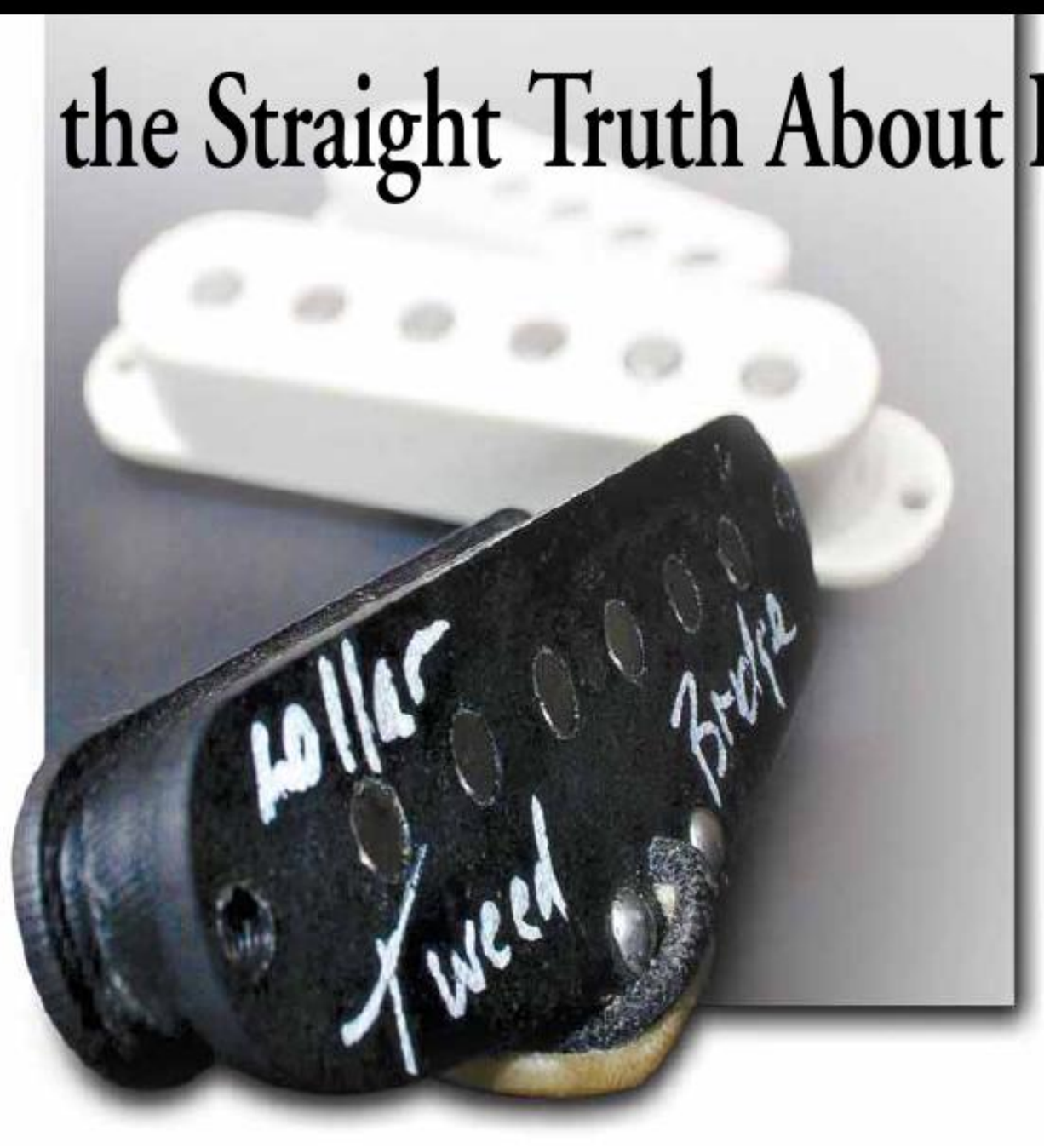

The "magic" found in some (but not all) classic vintage pickups was created by accident. Don't let anyone tell you different. And over time, some pretty stellar accidents happened. The only way to recreate that magic is to study more than a few exceptional examples of all the classic pickup types, while acquiring a thorough understanding of exactly what materials were used and precisely how each pickup was constructed and wound. Only then is the "magic" repeatable, if you are willing to spend the time and money required to chase the dragon. I am.

I personally design and wind over 30 different pickup models, including all the vintage classics, many obscure works of art known only to lap and pedal steel players like Robert Randolph, and even a few of my own designs that never existed in the past.

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"Tim Pierce" - continued from page 32

player. If you look at his hands on the guitar, it's the most natural thing you've ever seen. He plays a Hendrix song better than I do. The thing I love about Warren is that he lets me be absolutely free. Warren will do the rhythm guitars first, and then he'll let me play whatever I want. We finish a song in fifteen minutes sometimes because he'll let me do the first thing I think of, and maybe one other take, and we move on.

With Warren, I put the icing on the cake. With John, I do the heavy lifting so that he can do the icing. It is interesting. It's kind of the reverse. But, just to be clear, John does not need me when he has written the song, and most of what he records is songs that he has written. He just needs me when he wants to be a producer.

Can you select one track from your repertoire that you feel best represents your guitar work and describe how it was recorded?

It's a YouTube video called "Studio Guitar Recording Gibson Les Paul Black Beauty" [www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9D0Rcxm3YY] that I did a few months ago. I did a solo record [Guitarland] in the early '90s, and this is the same kind of music. It's funny that I would give you a YouTube video, but it's perfect because that's the modern way to reach people.

I wrote the song and used a drum program that I like. I recorded the acoustic guitar first, and that's a perfect example of my strumming. It's open and airy. I used a vintage C12A microphone from 1965 that I got from a friend of mine a few years ago. I recorded that through a vintage Neve mic pre and just a little bit of compression on a Distressor into Pro Tools. That's the acoustic sound.

I bought that black guitar from John Shanks about a year ago. John understands that I don't really go after vintage guitars, so he tries to help me now and then by selling me one. Like every other guy, he probably thinks, "What is wrong with Tim that he doesn't have any good guitars?" He sold me this '68 Les Paul. It was devalued by a broken neck, a bad fret job, and all these issues, and that made it affordable to me. It might be the best-sounding guitar I own. I think of how lucky I am to have these people who try to take care of me. I try to make the guitar like a lead singer. I dance between rhythm and melody. It's about being a little flashy here and there, but it's more about being melodic and trying to play dreamy. I used that through a Divided By 13 RSA 23, which is my favorite amp, but it could be any amp. There are so many good amps. You can make any amp sound like your sound. It's about finding the sweet spot in distortion, where the amp is clean and then begins to distort and fatten up, but it doesn't get too distorted; it begins to compress and bloom. I always search for the sweet spot halfway between clean and dirty. There are varying degrees of that, but that's where I like to live, where the guitar is touch-sensitive. You can strike it soft and have it be clean, and strike it hard and it begins to blossom and get aggressive. I think most guitar players aspire to that.

I used an MXR boost line driver and an overdrive pedal in front of it. I used a little bit of delay; I think it was my Eventide Eclipse. I like to use delays in Pro Tools because then they're negotiable and you can always dry the guitar up. Right now, and it changes sometimes, I'm using an SM57 and a Royer 122V, which is their tube ribbon mic, their flagship. I use those two blended. I like Celestion V30 speakers, so I have one on each speaker. The Royer was through an API, and the 57 was through a vintage Neve and no EQ. So that's an example of who I am and what I do best. It's not

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JHS Colour Box

by Michael Hodge

JHS continuously comes up with unique pedals. The Colour Box is based on a very special concept. The goal was to build a vintage, studio grade Neve 1073 Mic Preamp into a stomp box that can be used for Guitar, Bass, or even Vocals. It's a very challenging proposition. JHS has taken it on and now we get to enjoy the result!

OUT OF THE BOX:

The Colour Box ships in a sturdy cardboard box containing the pedal, a special 18V Triad Magnetics Power Supply, Instructions, a JHS sticker, and plastic bag with a red guitar pick, and JHS lapel button. The pedal is 2 ½ in. tall and 4 ½ by 3 5/8 inches wide.

It's about the size of the beloved TIM pedal. The review model is white, with seven knobs on top in two rows. The top row has three red knobs. The Master controls the overall output gain. Pre Volume is in-between the two gain stages and sets how much gain goes to the second stage. The Step knob is a five-stepped gain knob that clicks at intervals between 18 and 39 dB of gain. There is also a grey Hi Pass knob that goes from 60Hz to 800Hz with a 6dB per octave slope. Below is a mini-switch to engage it. The second row has three blue knobs. These are set to +/- 17dB of level at three musical EQ points. Treble is at 10kHz, Middle at 1kHz and Bass at 120Hz. Below the knobs are the chrome True Bypass Foot switch and a bright blue LED indicator. The right side has a combo input jack that accepts either XLR or ¼" cable. There are also two recessed switches, one for input select ¼" or XLR, and the other is a -20dB Pad. On the back is a BOSS type 18v DC center negative power supply jack that will take a standard 18v supply, or even a voltage doubling cable like the ones sold by Voodoo Lab. The Colour Box does come with it's own power supply included. On the left side is a dual parallel output featuring another combo XLR/1/4 jack and a standard ¼ in jack.

Inside the Box is the equivalent of two Neve 1073 circuits in Series and a LUNDAHL Transformer that is a big part of the fat sound. Having that particular transformer justifies the price of admission.

IN USE:

The first thing I tried it on was Bass. It's fantastic. The natural console type breakup is beautiful and cuts through a mix. Distortion on Bass increases the upper harmonic structure. It's a common tool used by top engineers to allow bass to be heard on laptop speakers and cheap ear buds. In a live situation the Colour box made the bass fatter and better and allowed us to get more of a point on the individual notes. It was fantastic. Moving on to guitar, this thing kills. On an acoustic I found the air on top I needed, yet it's not edgy like most acoustic preamps. You can really hear the difference with a very smooth hi end. The Hi pass helped prevent that typical low-end feedback.

RETRO:

Here's where most people are going to love this pedal. The unique sound of console distortion is a classic sound on Guitar. The Beatles, Led Zeppelin, U2, and Steely Dan for starters are known for using console distortion. Here's a firsthand example. I was doing an R&B session a few months ago in LA, and cartage hadn't shown up with my amp. I was really nervous. The producer didn't blink. He had the engineer plug my pedal board straight into the Neve console and we rocked on all day. It was a big learning experience and the guitar tone was perfect for the song. It turns out he does it all the time! I'm not getting rid of my amps, but love how it sounds plugged straight in too. You can totally do that with this pedal into your DAW. The original Klon Centaur is legendary for amazing tone and is one of those

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"Tim Pierce" - continued from page 34

necessarily modern, but that's OK.

Is it difficult to be objective in a session if the artist isn't very good?

When you do this professionally and make a living at it, and you're booked every day and work every day, as I am still, which is a miracle in 2015, there are often quality issues in the music that gets brought to you. I've never had a problem with that because … let's say that the singer sounds generic. I don't mind that because the track is usually good, the drums and bass are usually good, and I'm usually working for great people. There are 99 great things about it, so I don't get troubled by the one thing that may not be great. There are other musicians who get troubled by that stuff, and I don't fault them for it, but I've never had a problem with the quality issues that are inherent in being a musician who works every day. My job is to send them home with a layered guitar approach that makes their song sound like a record on the radio, and it really doesn't matter what quality issues they're up against. It might not be the greatest song ever written. It might not be the greatest singer in the world. But that doesn't bother me at all.

There's a certain amount of people-pleasing in session work.

Yes, it's all people-pleasing for me. You have to give them everything you've got, because they want their record to sound like the most amazing thing in the world. At the same time, you have to change on a dime, you have become friends with them quickly, and you have to get them to trust you quickly. If I'm in the room with an artist for six or eight hours and we're doing a number of songs, I'm basically onstage that whole time. It's 100 percent people-pleasing, and beyond that, you have to do great work, too. That's one of the reasons I don't crave playing live, because the actual experience of getting this job done and making everybody in the room happy is such that by the end of the day, I'm satisfied. I try and hold on to people for life if I can, and when there's somebody that has worked with me for decades, I try to make every single minute, hour, and day count.

"Session guitar player" used to mean studio. Now it can mean home studio and sending files. How much do you do of each?

I tracked with Adele recently in a major studio, so it still happens and it was wonderful. She was great. She sang live with us, she was there for the whole process, and it was marvelous. That happens a little less every year for me. I would say five years ago it was 50/50. Now it could be 70/30 or 50/50 some months, but if you're looking at an entire year, it's 80/20 or 90/10, and that is mostly at home. Everybody's career is different, so this is a natural thing for me and I kind of created it. I can offer people an amazing thing in my home studio and it has become a very successful business. I do not work alone. I insist that people be in the room with me or be with me on Skype. That's a common misconception that people have about me working at home. They want me to do the files for them, but that's not an interest of mine. I like the energy and enthusiasm of having somebody with me. If they're in town, I try to get them to drive over. There are people who live

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PEDAL SNAPSHOT

by Phil Traina

ThorpyFX- www.thorpyfx.com

Before I get into the tone of these two pedal offerings from ThorpyFX I must say a few words about the presentation. The box came in the mail, and as always I was very excited to see what is inside. I opened the box to see the two larger white boxes with stickers that differentiated each pedal. The first one I opened was the Gunshot. It was like Christmas, purple tissue paper wrapped sealed with a sticker. Then I got to the next layer of white tissue paper, with some extra padding for good measure. The Muffroom Cloud was very similar, only with orange paper. Overall the presentation was stellar and it got the experience off on the right foot.

Gunshot OD (£184.99 Pounds)

I must admit I am an overdrive junkie. The Gunshot satisfied all my urges. The visual aesthetics of the Gunshot were different than many pedals. It had a very "militaristic meets classic" enclosure, laser engraved on a polished stainless steel surface. The Gunshot can handle tones from smooth bluesy to Rock N'Roll. The cascading gain stages and burr-brown op amp help aid in the dynamics that allow this circuit to react like a tube amplifier, or valve as they say across the pond. The controls are a simple four-knob layout: Gain, Tone, Volume, and Caliber. All controls were self-explanatory except for the caliber control. The caliber adds a rich harmonic content while filling out the base tone very nicely. In a world that has a seemingly unending sea of overdrives, the Gunshot is something to look at. You will understand in only a few seconds of playing that there is something special under the hood.

The Muffroom Cloud (£184.99 Pounds)

Thorpyfx has taken a classic circuit and served it up on a versatile platter. Typical big muff style pedals are very rig specific. Some sound amazing with one rig and are lack luster with others. The Muffroom Cloud has been designed to handle pretty much anything you would throw at it. I ran it with sinnglecoils and humbuckers through Marshall, Fender, and Mesa Boogie style rigs and it delivered. The Muffroom cloud has brought to market one of the most flexible fuzz pedals available. The active bass and treble EQ controls allow you to tailor your tone to your rig. The volume and sustain controls do as they say, allowing the sustain to seemingly go on forever into a controlled feedback. I had a blast playing with this fuzz pedal, and I'm glad they are available in the U.S.

Walrus Audio Messner MSRP $189

The Messner is a beautifully designed low gain overdrive pedal. It takes your core tone and enhances it. The term "transparent" has been thrown around with pedal manufactures for years now. This actually IS a transparent dynamic style overdrive. It's for the player who is happy with the basic tone from their rig, but wants to take it up a notch. The simple controls: Output, Color, and Gain are pretty basic, but the open and closed switch adds some nice texture to the circuit. In the open position there are no clipping diodes in the circuit, and with little to no compression it gives you a very organic tone. In the closed position it adds some clipping with a bit of compression. Overall I would use this as a first position overdrive, maybe as an "always on" due to how subtle it can be. Walrus Audio has been making some great advancement in the industry with the verbs and delays and fuzzes. I'm glad to see another simple drive pedal that sounds great and is practical and very useful.

www.walrus audio.com

DryBell Vibe Machine MSRP $295.00

DryBell is based out of Croatia. It is the smallest, most comprehensive vibe pedal out there. The key to the vibe pedal circuit is photocells. They are hard to source, and if you do they are very inconsistent. Drybell has their own proprietary photocells produced. This helps them thwart the typical vibe pedal woes. The feature set is pretty straightforward: Intensity and Speed knobs coupled with 2 switches: Vibrato / Chorus and a Bright / Original. There is an external input for an expression pedal, as well as 3 external trim pots. The trim pots are to reduce the volume up to 4db, and there is a symmetry and range to change up the throb of the vibrato. Overall the Vibe Machine delivers a classic tone of the best Univibe, but keeps the footprint small and gives you tones of tweakable options. Drybell nailed this tone, and if you are looking for a killer vibe tone look no further.

www.drybell.com

PettyJohn Petty Drive MSRP $399

I am looking at the Petty Drive Deluxe. This is a 2 for 1 overdrive unit that covers quite a bit of ground. Each side has a set of similar controls. Even though they are not labeled, it is very simple to get around this box.

The Chime side is designed to be a boost or low gain drive, and it really does give you that chimey tone. The chime side has a tilt EQ tone knob with an orange drop filter cap. It really does sweeten the EQ and allows you to shape the tone to match your rig. A 3-way clipping and 3-way low cut allow for further tone tweakability and let you match it up to different playing styles and gear.

The Iron side is a low to medium gain overdrive. It can get pretty thick and saturated when you pump up the gain. The clean mix knob allows you to blend the clean signal in as you desire. I loved this because it allowed me to keep the note separation and clarity while driving the gain pretty hard. The parallel effects loop lets you run your different effects and not have them be affected by the gain. I used a simple delay and it works like a champ. The 3-way clipping and 3-way low cuts work similarly to the chime channel, and the hi-cut tone knob lets you dial back a bit of harshness when you need to. Overall, the PettyDrive is a great addition to the Pettyjohn family. I was able to get Vox, Fender, and Marshall style sounds out of this box. My personal opinion is the chime side alone is worth the price of admission. If you need an overdrive that covers tons of ground and sound great, the PettyJohn Predrive may be for you.

www.pettyjohnelectronics.com

Phil Traina, The Gear Concierge
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VIEW OF THE DAY

by Dave Cleveland

Direct Recording is Cool

Hello and welcome again to the View of the Day!

I'm excited to talk about a couple of greatpieces of gear that I have been using over the past couple of years. One is the mighty Kemper Profiling Amp, and the other is called a Palmer PDI03B. Both of these pieces of gear provide direct recording in a most excellent way. If you have a little home studio and can't crank your tube amp up to where it sounds good, then you should look into one of these amazing amp/cab simulators.

First is the Kemper Profiling Amp. When I was introduced to this at the NAMM show about 3 years ago I was totally floored. Not only did it sound like an amp, but it felt like an amp! Why? Because the Kemper, through unbelievable technology, is able to capture the sound of the amp, the cabinet, the mic, the mic placement, and the mic pre amp/compressor. Whatever the signal path is, the Kemper will profile it. I really put it to the test when I first got it. I profiled every amp I owned. With the Kemper you can literally A/B the real amp with the profiled amp. During the process you can fine-tune the profile until you can't hear the difference between the amp and the Kemper. It really is amazing! Having successfully stored all my amps in the Kemper I was ready to head to the studio, sans my guitar amps.

Engineer purists met me with serious skepticism, but the Kemper won them over! The cool thing is that you can have these great amp tones, but also have access to an arsenal of high quality effects. You can choose where in the signal path you want these effects to go, which is a huge bonus. I love being able to pull up my Tyler JT46 preset and then put delay or reverb on the backside of it. You get these beautiful spacious sounds while retaining the sound of the tube amp dynamics.

I went to Europe on a tour with the Getty's, and only brought the Kemper. Because we were playing large venues with a choir and an orchestra, the Kemper was a huge help with the soundmen because there was no amp bleed in the room. Plus, having the monitor mix through the ears, I had consistency from one venue to the next.

Another bonus with the Kemper is the access to all parameters, either via MIDI or direct controllers. Throw in a super accurate tuner and you are ready for any gig that comes your way, live or studio. I have several of my session buddies that use the Kemper on a regular basis with great success: Kelly Back, Jerry Mcpherson, Mark Baldwin, Tom Hemby, and Michael Elsner, just to name a few.

The other super cool thing is that it really sounds great with your pedalboard. You can pull up one of your amp presets, like a Fender Deluxe or Matchless, and hit it with pedals just like you would the real amp. This really gives credibility to the Kemper's magic. Tone and feel, all in a box just bigger than a lunchbox! You know you want one! Just do it!

Okay, so you want to keep using your amps and not do the profiling thing. Well, I have a solution for you and you can still crank your amp at midnight in your apartment or house. This lovely piece of gear is the Palmer PDI03 JB (Joe Bonamassa Signature model). The Palmer is only a cabinet simulator, so you will need a load box with it. I use the Suhr Reactive load. This allows you to fool your amp into thinking there is a real speaker hooked up to it. I really like the Suhr because it is load reactive. It just makes the Palmer feel better.

So how do you hook it up? God question! Using high quality speaker cable, you go out of the main out of the amp into the Palmer speaker in. From there you run another high quality speaker cable from the thru of the Palmer to the "amp in" on the Suhr

continued on page 48

DEERING

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Graham Sharp of the Steep Canyon Rangers
with his Deering Terry Baucom Model

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HEARTLAND TONE SC-625 PICKUP

The SC-625 pickup by Heartland Tone faithfully re-creates the classic Stratocaster tone, but with a darker edge and fuller bass response. Slightly overwound by hand, the SC-625 has a higher output and warmer overtones than the Standard Stratocaster pickups.

If you're looking to add some thickness to your Stratocaster tones while retaining its classic vibe, the SC-625 by Heartland Tone is the pickup for you!

$140.00 Calibrated Set (Neck, Middle, Bridge)

What

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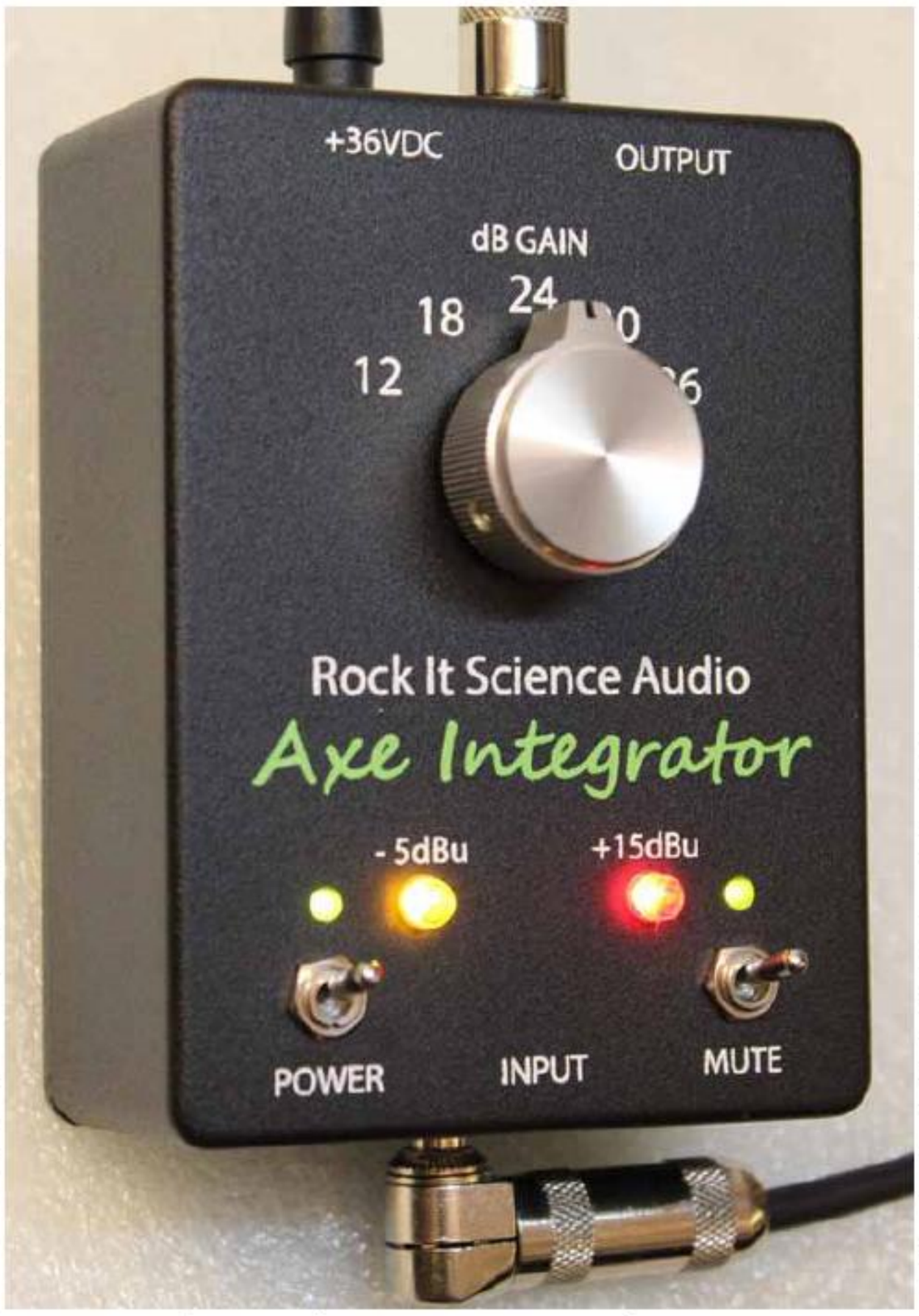
www.republicguitars.com facebook.com/republicguitars

Axe Integrator Instrument Preamplifier

by Jack Mao



The Axe Integrator Instrument Preamplifier is the first commercially available product from Rock It Science Audio and in particular from professional recording engineer / producer Richard Zeier who developed the device out of a practical need for a high quality instrument preamplifier for his own recording sessions. The Axe Integrator is an All-Discrete Class A transformer coupled Instrument Preamplifier designed for high-quality studio recording of acoustic or electric guitar, bass and any other instrument with built in pickups that requires a high impedance input.

The Axe Integrator runs on a + 36 Volt DC that is provided by the included external power supply. The device is about the size and shape of guitar stomp box meaning you won't have to sacrifice hardly any desktop or studio real estate to find a home for it in your recording rig.

The main feature on the front panel of the Axe Integrator is a Rotary Switch which allows the user to dial in 12, 18, 24, 30 or 36 dB of gain. There is also a mute switch with an LED Indicator, a LED -5dBu and +15dBu Output Level Indicator and an On / Off Power Switch. You plug your Guitar or Bass into the devices ¼" Unbalanced Instrument Jack and connect to your DAW, A/ D converter, etc. through the ¼" TRS Output Jack which allows for balanced or unbalanced +22 dBu Output.

While most professional audio recording equipment will handle the Axe Integrator's +22 dBu output level, other equipment types may become overloaded causing distortion to be heard. The Axe Integrator manual suggests that it's a good idea to start with the rotary Gain switch set at the lowest (12dB) setting and play the instrument while watching the output level indicator LEDs. A properly adjusted signal level will cause the constant flashing of the Yellow -5dBu LED with occasional flashing of the Red + 15 dBu LED. The manual goes on to suggest that the overall gain should be adjusted to accommodate both instrument type and output destination.

I tested the Axe Integrator in my home recording studio running Protocols 11 via a Digi 003 Interface. I tested the device with several different instruments and overall I found the Axe Integrator to be an ideal front end to my various ProTools acoustic and electric guitar plug in's. While the preamp sounded great with my electric guitars it sounded particularly good with my acoustic guitar and seemed add some clarity and sparkle without detracting from the overall tone.

Overall, I like the overall simplicity of the device and like the way it's transparent and color neutral, that is to say, I like the way the Axe Integrator did not add or take away anything from the sound of the instrument's I had plugged into it. I like technology that is designed to do one thing extremely well and the Axe Integrator definitely falls into that category. My overall impression of the Axe Integrator is that it is a user friendly, practical and portable instrument preamplifier that's great for a wide variety of recording applications, either in studio or on the road. Its small size makes it a perfect traveling companion or great addition to your home or professional recording studio. While the Axe Integrator does not have as elaborate a feature set as some of the "big name" instrument preamplifiers on the market, it does what it's designed to do extremely well and the $299 price point is on target for what you are getting.

The Axe Integrator is currently available direct from Rock It Science Audio. For more information visit www.RockItScienceAudio.com.

PRODUCT REVIEW

Truetone 1SPOT Pro Power Supplies

by Doug Doppler

When Truetone (formerly Visual Sound) introduced the 1 SPOT, their goal was to address the challenges players were facing when powering up pedal boards filled with 9v pedals. While the 1 SPOT remains an industry standard, the Truetone 1 SPOT Pro line was designed to address the complex array of power requirements today's pedal boards present.

The 1 SPOT Pro is currently available in two models, the CS7 and CS12, featuring seven and twelve outputs respectively. Each of these outputs is fully isolated and filtered, preventing ground and power-related noise from being introduced into your signal chain.

The 1 SPOT Pro CS12 arrived just as I was collecting pedals to assemble a fairly sophisticated acoustic pedal board. The five voltage options (variable 4-9v DC, 9v DC, 12v DC, 18v DC, and 9v AC) allowed me to power all the pedals I'd gathered including the Eventide H9 I *had* to have on this board. The CS12 comes with all the power cables you'll need, color-coded by length making for a super fast setup. The kit even included the reverse polarity converter plug I needed to eliminate the pesky adapter on my H9.

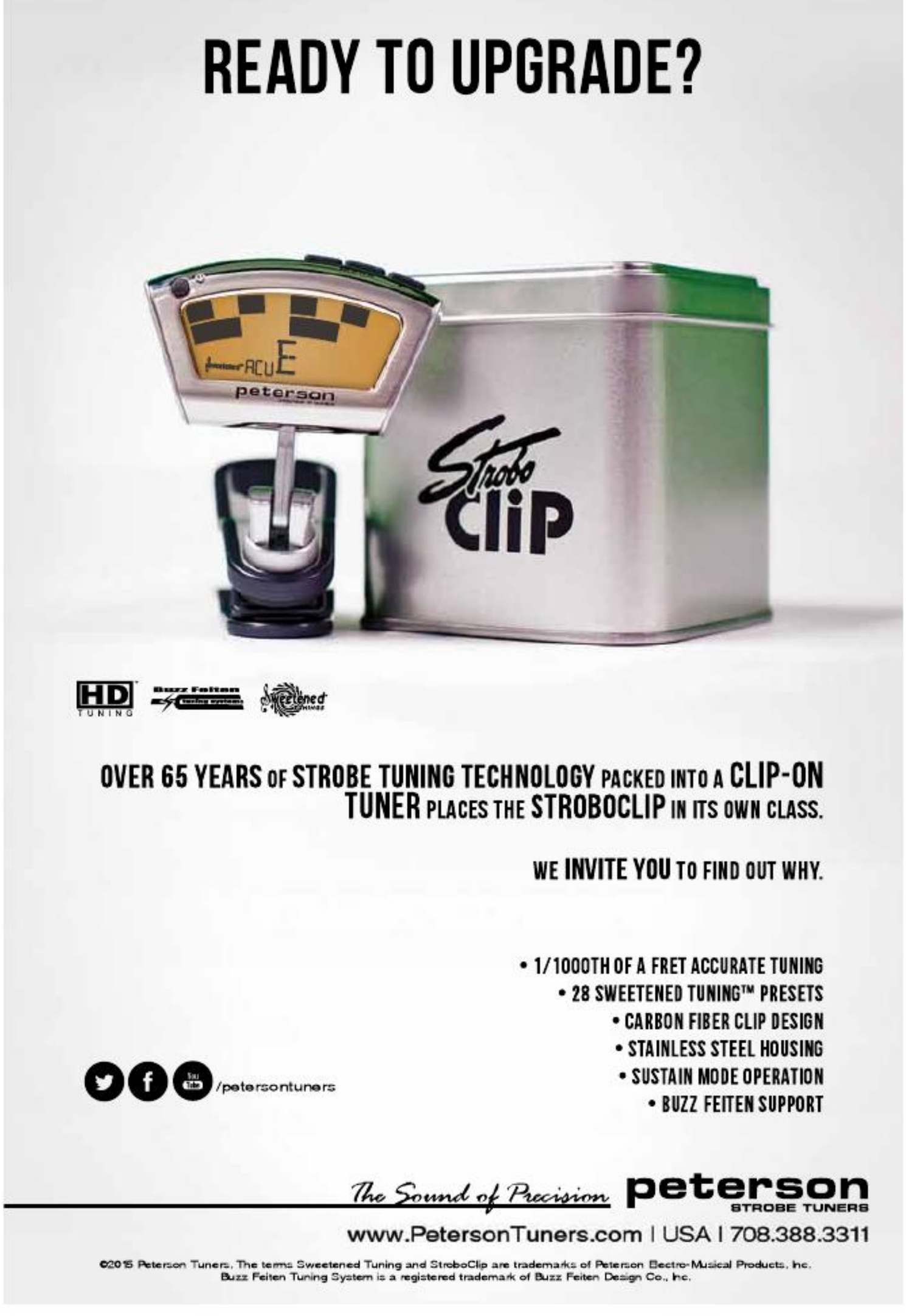
Thanks to the CS12, I was able to transform a stack of pedals into a killer board in far less than an hour. Implicit in my definition of killer, is a board that has zero ground-related issues. While acoustic pedal boards don't tend to include drive pedals, any and all noise is immediately noticeable, especially when using a compressor. This board was a dream to assemble – and use!

The CS7 and CS12 come with enough power cables and converter plugs to power up 99% of the pedals on the market. Both models also include Pedaltrain mounting brackets and screws. For more information please visit Truetone.com

1 SPOT Pro CS12: $179.95 Street

1 SPOT Pro CS7: $119.95 Street

When Doug Doppler is not writing gear reviews, the former Guitar Hero session player and Favored Nations recording artist spends his days, hours, weeks and years demoing the coolest gear on the planet for his web site GearTunes.com.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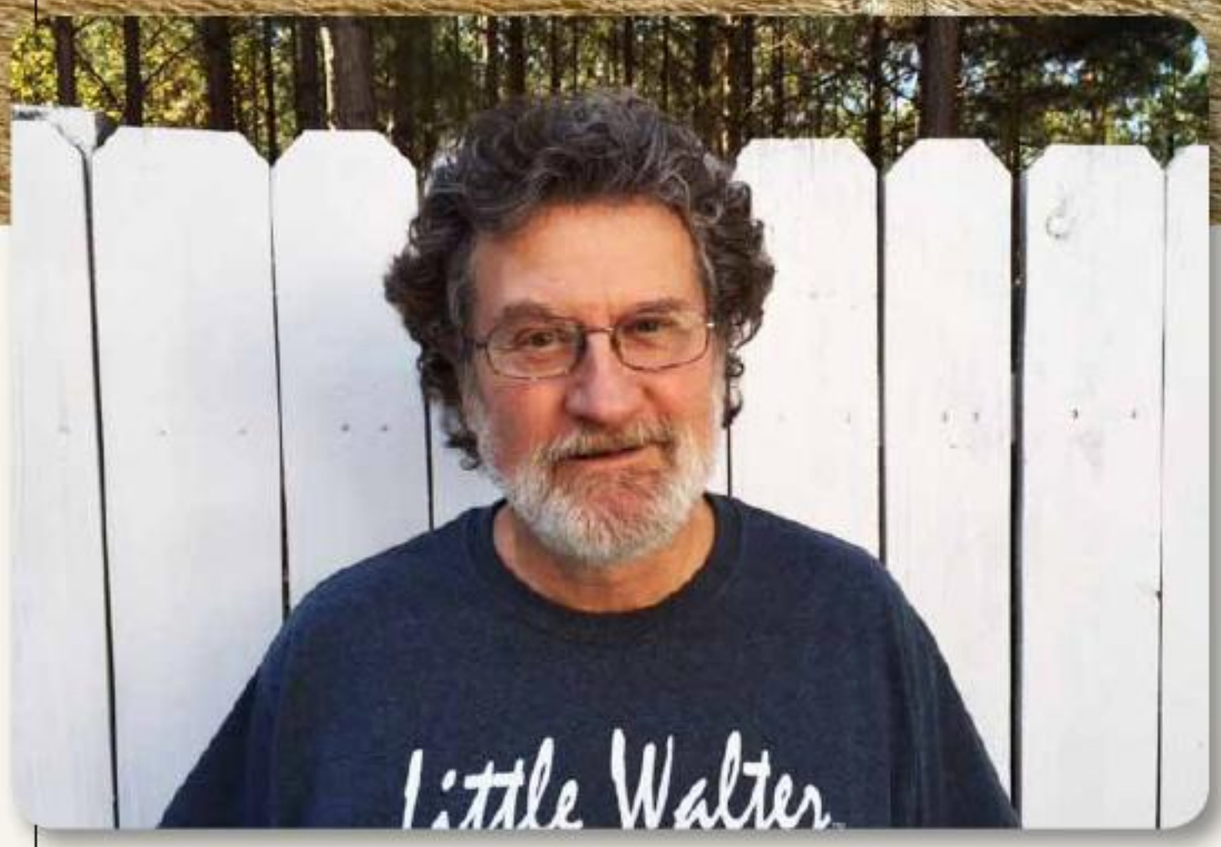
Little Walter Tube Amplifiers

by Eric Dahl



A few years ago I met Phil Bradbury, designer and builder of Little Walter™ Tube Amps, at the Franklin TN Guitar Show put on by the Three Amigos. This year I was invited to a private Little Walter™ Amp Event at the V-Picks compound and was allowed to test out their entire line of amps with my personal instruments. Little Walter™ Amps is a family operated business where Phil builds the amps and deals with customers, while his wife Carol maintains the business and marketing side of things. Now let's dig in a little deeper on the origin of the company and new models for 2015.

Eric: How did you come up with the name Little Walter™ Amplifiers?

Phil: Back in the late 70's while working in the coal mining industry I was interviewed on TV in Lexington, KY about a UMWA altercation that involved my parents. The following day during a meeting one of my co-workers said he had seen me on TV and was going to start calling me "Little Walter" (a reference to Walter Cronkite) and the nickname stuck. Years later I needed to come up with a name for these amps and saw my Harley helmet on the floor with "Little Walter" painted on the back. So we called our amps "Little Walter Tube Amps" and eventually trademarked the name Little Walter™.

Eric: When and where did you start building your own amplifiers?

Phil: Around 2007 in West End, NC, I took my first designs and built a couple of prototypes to test my theories on tube amplification. I started collecting every book, manual, and article pertaining to the early amplification models and the methods of construction. I filled up three legal pads with notes and this evolved into my "Little Walter Rules of Tone".

Eric: What drove you to build your own amps?

Phil: I had recorded a collection of my own songs in an attempt to learn Pro-Tools and capture some of my song ideas and started noticing the lack of good tone that my guitar amps had. So, I started hand-building each chassis the same way that Leo Fender had in the very first days of amplification.

Eric: How many different amplifier models do you currently offer?

Phil: I build two different series of amplifiers. The series 8 models use octal (8 pin) preamp tubes and I classify these as "Low Gain" amps, since they emphasize tone rather than sheer volume and gain.

The series 9 models utilize the modern Noval (9 pin) preamp tubes and I classify these as "Higher Gain" amps, although they still have a very clean open tonality but can provide more "Horsepower".

Within these two amp series I use three different Power Tube Platforms: 6V6, 6L6, and KT series tubes. When I start fitting the proper amp to an artist I find the proper power tube for their genre, playing style, instrumentation and wattage needs!

Eric: You seem to have some high profile players on the Little Walter™ Amplifiers roster now?

Phil: We have been fortunate that top musicians have gravitated towards our amps like: Vince Gill, Paul Franklin, Brent Mason, Reggie Young, James Burton,

Dann Huff, Walter Becker, Andy Reiss and Joe Don Rooney.

Eric: 2015 has really been a great year for your company. What are some of the new and signature models that you are releasing these year?

Phil: This year we introduced the "59" and the "89" along with our 100 Watt Tube Bass Amp.

The '59 is becoming our standard for gigging guitarists who love the tone they are getting with it.

Our latest introduction to our line is the 100 watt all tube bass amp. This amp uses 4 KT-120's and is mated to a pair of our new B112 ported cabinets.

Eric: What makes Little Walter™ Amps better or different than other boutique amplifiers on the market?

Phil: I hesitate to answer this, as I don't really feel comfortable saying my amps are better than someone else's. I would rather point out that I started Little Walter™ Tube Amps to provide something different. As Vince Gill says "If you want to hear what your instrument sounds like play it through a Little Walter™ Amp."

Eric: How many amps do you currently create per year?

Phil: I build between 150-200 Amps per year at this time.

Eric: How many people are currently employed at Little Walter?

Phil: At this time I hand-build every amplifier and Carol, my wife, handles all of the business stuff, so it's just the two of us. I create build manuals for each of my designs just for this reason.

Eric: Where can Collectible Guitar readers' tryout and buy Little Walter™ Amplifiers?

Phil: We prefer to work one on one with our customers. We currently have a few select dealers that we work with and we hold clinics in different parts of the USA so that people can hear and try out the amps. My favorite sales model is working directly with the customer, which allows me to personally find the perfect tool for their music and performance needs.

Eric: What is your goal for Little Walter™ Amps in the future?

Phil: To achieve a sales point that allows Carol and I to enjoy our life while maintaining the hand-built quality and magical tone that we have come to be known by and continue growing our Little Walter™ "Family" of players and artists.

Eric: Why should players try out a Little Walter™ amp compared to the mass produced amplifiers on the market today?

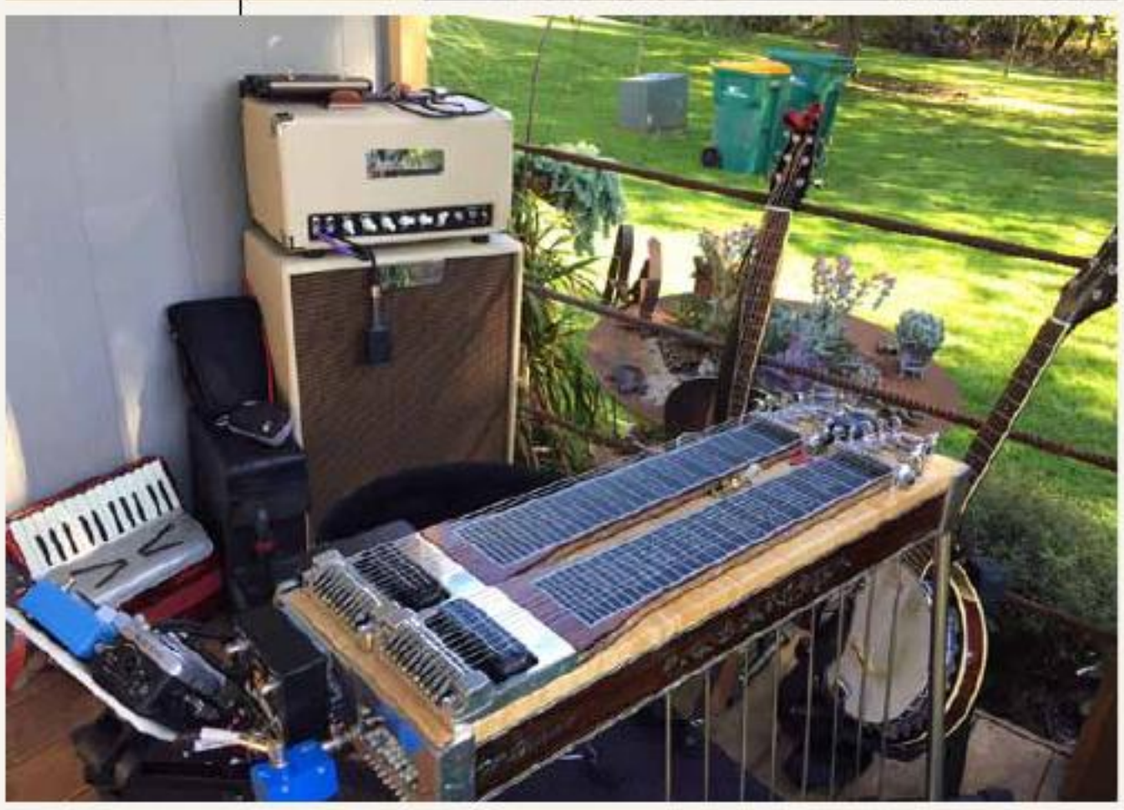
Phil: An artist needs to understand that several things factor in to what their audience hears, whether it is in a recording or a live performance: Their years of hard work and diligence, their instrument, and their amplifier. All of these ingredients need to work together like cogs in a wheel. I believe that there is a bit of magic in what we are producing. I honestly believe that our amps give each artist or musician a bit of an advantage in the studio or on the stage in a very competitive industry. You would not buy a Ferrari and put thrift shop tires on it...

Eric: If I ordered a Little Walter™ Amp today how long would it take for delivery?

Phil: There is usually a 6 – 8 week wait for a build, but that has become increasingly longer. We have now stretched that out to 10-12 weeks and it depends on the model of amplifier purchased.

Eric: What do you feel has been your greatest success in launching Little Walter™ Amplifiers?

Phil: Carol and I both feel that the sound and quality of the amp comes first, but feel that it is equally important how you interface with the customer and the relationship you create with each person you build an amp for. We feel extremely blessed to be part of this industry and will do everything in our power to help make it better whenever we can.



Little Walter™ amps have seen increased growth in 2015 thanks to big name stage and studio musicians playing them. Prices range from $1,500 through $3,500, If you would like to learn more about their amps visit their website at www.littlewaltertubeamps.com. ◇

FEATURE

C.F. Martin Harvey Leach Cowboy Custom Milestone Guitar

by Bruce Adolph

At *Collectible Guitar,* we try to celebrate guitars in all price ranges that are intriguing for our readers to know about and possibly even own.

Sometimes the price tags are surprisingly low and occasionally they are on the other end of the scale. This Martin Cowboy Custom guitar is definitely on the high-end, but let's learn why.

If you are a fan of the TV show "Shark Tank" you might remember several years ago that Jeff Cohen (CEO of the innovative travel guitar company Voyage-Air Guitar) was a contestant and one shark/entrepreneur grilled him unreasonably. Voyage-Air guitars actually fold in half with a unique hinge system to break down for travel. I have personally used these on trips and they work great. Jeff didn't leave that first show with a business deal, but the television exposure crashed their website as so many people were looking to find out more about their guitars. Shark Tank invited Jeff back for several follow up appearances. He then negotiated a deal with the very shark that was initially unreasonable. Each time one of Jeff's episodes aired, Voyage-Air would get a lot more interest in their guitars.

Jeff is offering up a truly remarkable Martin collectible guitar for sale from his private collection. We thought we should find out more about it before it goes into someone else's personal collection and it doesn't see the light of day for a while.

When C.F. Martin was nearing their one-millionth guitar made, they decided to do a series of ten very special guitars that would build up to that milestone. The first one made in this grouping is the one Jeff is selling now. It retailed for $195,000.00. No, that is not a typo. $5,000.00 short of $200,000.00. It is called the Harvey Leach Cowboy Custom "Smoke and Mirrors" and as you will see from the photos the back and sides are made of investment grade Brazilian tonewood. Not to mention the truly artistic inlay work of Harvey Leach himself is quite prevalent on the guitar.

Jeff has kept this truly significant guitar in perfect shape (kept in a humidity controlled glass case). He is selling the guitar for $180,000.00. It comes with the original custom hard-shell case, the commemorative book and tons of "case candy" from Martin (including the original plaque that shows the original price of $195,000).

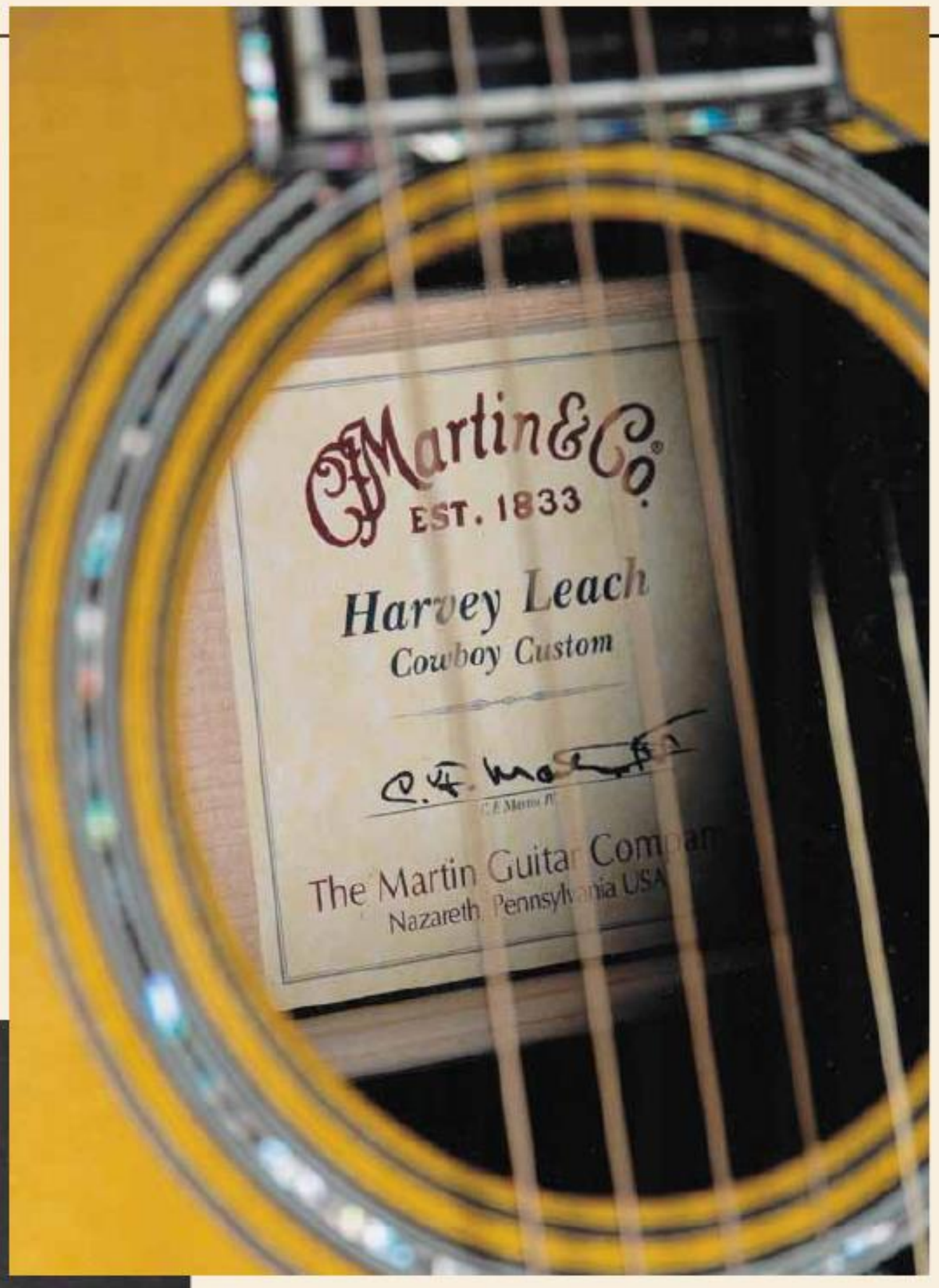
I don't think I can begin to explain why this guitar is so special better than the CEO of Martin himself, Chris Martin IV. Here is the letter that you receive with the book about this guitar.

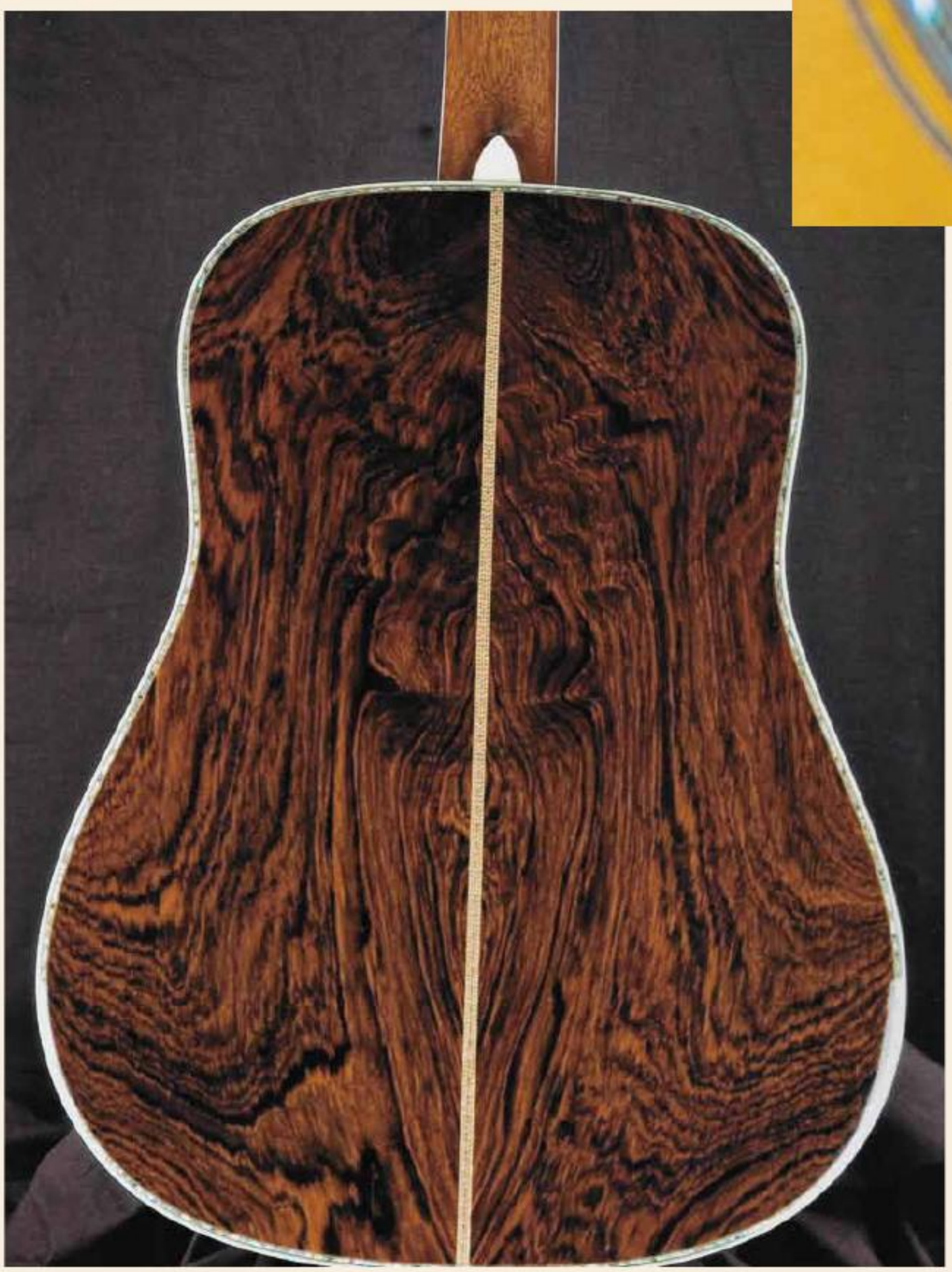
"A note from C.F. Martin IV, Chairman and CEO

The Martin Guitar Company is proud to present the 'Harvey Leach Cowboy Custom'. Since our company was founded some 170 years ago, one million guitars have now passed through the skilled hands of our luthiers and craftsmen, who have long upheld our tradition of excellence. Along the way, major serial number milestones were celebrated with one-of-a-kind museum pieces, most of which are on display at our factory in Nazareth, Pennsylvania. The original Celtic Knot was introduced at serial number 600,000, the China Dragon at number 700,000, the Peacock at 750,000, and the Custom HD-35 at 800,000. In planning the production of our one millionth guitar, we decided to do a fifth museum-grade piece to highlight our history and legacy. The decision was made to create the 'Cowboy Custom'. Working with inlay artist extraordinaire Harvey Leach, we decided to build a guitar that spoke to the roots of our company, founded in 1833. This guitar is truly a piece of history. The detail work and craftsmanship are truly a work of art. With our millionth guitar now built and on display here in Nazareth, we look forward to continuing to create the world's finest guitars in our quest to reach the next million.

Sincerely,

Christian Frederick Martin IV"





The guitar is located in Livermore, California and is available to be inspected by appointment.

For further information about this special guitar or to discuss purchasing details, please contact Barney Leeson at bleeson@voyageairguitar.com or 925-271-4330. ◇

"Quirky Vintage" cont. from page 10

There's one volume and one tone (still with the incorrect knobs attached), and the handy slide switch allows the player to choose between rhythm and lead sounds. To activate this, one must roll off the tone control completely to hear any difference. The pickguard is a cream colored plastic unit with a black stripe painted around the outline. Years of strumming by a previous owner(s), has resulted in the stripe being worn away on mine. Not a big deal, as this is strictly a player's grade guitar.

So, how does it play? Let's put it this way; Supros are outstanding slide guitars, and this one is no exception. Ask Joe Perry of Aerosmith about his beloved Supro Ozark. If this writer were to use this instrument for standard playing with all the bluesy string bending I do, the tuning pegs would have to be replaced, and right away. Their age is showing, but in an open tuning like E or G, this guitar is a killer. Played clean, it exhibits a small amount of breakup, and with overdrive piled on, it screams like a banshee, with sustain 'till tomorrow. You've got to love those old Supro pickups. Others have tried to reproduce these little gems, but to my ears, have not succeeded.

The Belmont was a strong seller for the company in the late 1950s and early '60s, so there are plenty of them around, although prices have climbed. Once considered pawnshop finds, Supro, as well as other second line brands such as Danelectro, Kay, Harmony, EKO, and the hundreds of variations of Japanese guitars of that era, are rarely seen in pawnshops these days, much to the chagrin of collectors and players. Supro Belmonts are readily available at the moment of this writing on eBay, Gbase and Reverb.com. Expect to pay anywhere from $699 to $999 for one in good, playable condition, but keep in mind, they may need work. The Belmont's next of kin was the white Dual Tone with two pickups, and it was Rory Gallagher's slide guitar of choice for years. It's no secret that Rory knew about that terrific Supro tone.

Bob Cianci is a lifelong musician, music journalist, and author of the book, Great Rock Drummers of The Sixties, and has written extensively for many guitar and drum publications, newspapers, websites, and fanzines. He is a working guitarist and drummer in three bands in New Jersey. His guitar collection numbers over twenty-five pieces at the moment, and is constantly evolving.

"JHS Colour Box Review" cont. from page 36

guitar player "secret weapons". Here's more good news, there are some settings on the Colour Box that totally get that vibe. After seeing the demo on the JHS site, I put them side-by-side, and tried it for myself. It's pretty impressive. As an overdrive-distortion pedal on a pedalboard you can get a great Hendrix Strat thing, and with a Les Paul you can emphasize the cool frequencies that make that guitar great.

One last feature I'll share is the dual output. One is a standard ¼ inch, and the other can be your XLR Direct out. In the studio, we often run a separate XLR direct signal for re-amping later if needed. With this pedal, if we want that console distortion sound, we are already set up, plugged in, and can just crank the Colour Box with the amp on standby. Another useful application: if you're doing a live recording, the DI can save the day if there is bleed from another instrument into your guitar amp mics. You can just re-amp the DI and keep the original energy. If you do have to fix something you can easily match the tone later through the DI as well. This is really helpful since many instruments do get re-cut on live records, and that bleed will possibly contain a wrong note causing havoc in the mix, etc.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

The Colour Box is pure tone. If you are familiar with the sound of a Neve 1073 channel strip you already know what this pedal is about. It can be everything from a Bass DI, Acoustic DI, Distortion Pedal, or even a Vocal mic Pre. If you have a home studio, you could use it as your main mic pre. I know this may sound like a paid advertisement, but it's not. I've personally not seen anything quite like this before. Musicians will get a lot of use from this pedal. A stereo version for Keyboard players would be nice. At a price point of $399.00 it's a very solid value. For more info go to;

https://www.jhspedals.com/products/guitar-pedals/colourbox.

Michael Hodge is a guitarist and producer from Nashville, TN

"View of the Day" cont. from page 40

reactive load box. On the Palmer there is a balanced out that you can run straight into your audio interface or a mic pre/compressor. Think of it as a mic and treat it like you would a Shure SM57. It also has an unbalanced out that allows you to run into your time based effects and then go either stereo or mono from your effects.

That is what I really love about this setup. You can literally dime the amp and use the switches on the Palmer to fine tune your sound and then run it into your delay and/or reverb to get these huge, amazing sounds direct.

Take a look at the Palmer to see the switches. Having this rig really lets you explore all the subtle dynamic ranges of the amp. It's way cool!

Well, it looks like my time is up. I hope you will check out these two worthy options as you experiment with running direct. Best to each of you, and God bless!

Dave Cleveland is a session guitarist from Nashville. He's recorded for Miley Cyrus, Martina McBride, Stephen Stills, Judy Collins, Whitney Wolanin & Girls Generation. He recently wrote the tv theme for Mud People and Mustang Millionaire.

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FEATURE

Call me Cuz
A Conversation with Kenny Vaughan

by Roger Sterry

Over dinner at a great place in Nashville called Josephine's, the man everyone knows as Cousin Kenny and I got to visit and know each other. It was apparent from the start that Kenny Vaughan and I have a lot in common. We both have beautiful wives, both have three daughters, both love baseball, we're both foodies, and we both love guitars. It's at this stage where the similarities end. I merely pick at the guitar, and he is a world-class guitar picker. So much so that he has his own signature guitar from the RS Guitarworks folks (and it's selling pretty well too).

The thing with Kenny is, he's a very humble guy, and to get him to talk about himself you have to really "pull & tug". Talking about his boss, Marty Stuart and Co-workers, Handsome Harry Stinson and Mr. Music royalty himself, Chris Scruggs, is easy. It's easy to see the love he has for these guys, his eyes light up, and he gets kind of animated and excited. Get him talking about wife (Carmella Ramsey, a notable musician in her own right) and his girls, and it's all over.

The kid from Colorado (well not to make the Okies upset, he was born in Oklahoma but moved as a toddler to the Denver area) has been in the business a long time; he came to Nashville close to 30 years ago. He picked up work with Sweethearts of the Rodeo, Patty Loveless, and many other artists, has played in countless numbers (thousands) of studio sessions, was awarded Musician of the year, as well as a Lifetime Achievement award by the Americana Music Association, and for close to 15 years now he has called Marty Stuart his boss (and friend).

He has a solo project called "V" and it is excellent. There's one song called "Mysterium" that I've listened at least a hundred times and I never tire of it. His guitar collection has some pretty impressive members, and he doesn't know it yet but he's going have dinner with me again one day and we are going to talk about the other great guitars he has (a '66 strat to name one). But this time around we're going to focus on a newer guitar from a guitar maker in Kentucky (I mentioned it already: RS Guitarworks).

Getting a guitar in the hands of the Superlatives (Marty Stuart's Band) is a tough task. Marty and Kenny are very particular. They know the sound and feel they want and know immediately if a guitar will pass muster or not. If you haven't caught the Marty Show in a town or city near you, please do so. You will quickly see the sound that they capture. Marty and Kenny both play guitar and it's very obvious they don't "compete" with each other. More often than not the sound you hear from Cousin Ken is on his RS signature model. It's a gorgeous axe with Silver sparkle that complements not only the "sound of the Superlatives", but also the look. (They are the best-dressed act in town with Manuel or Jaime threads.) Kenny and I have a deal. I have an antique Cadillac that was Lefty Frizzel's that is getting restored, and Kenny will be the first one to drive it when it's completed . . . but he has to wear one of his stage outfits while doing so. Well, back to guitars. I now invite you to join us in our conversation.

Roger Sterry: So tell me, why RS guitars?

Kenny Vaughan: Oh, well, Paul Martin helped me make that connection. I had a tele of some sort and the wiring was messed up and I read about these guys in Kentucky that do real good work, in

fact I think they are one of the best in restoration. They were selling real high quality pots for the tele, so I bought them and I told Paul about it (He's from Winchester, KY where RS is located). Roy (Vice President of RS Guitarworks) knows Paul real well. Anyway, those 2 hooked up and they built a Bass for Paul. I picked it up and played 2 notes on it and it was amazing. I called Roy and we talked about a guitar.

RS: What were you looking for?

KV: Well, I wanted a tele. I wanted vintage appointments with a certain tone, etc. It had to have regular fender frets; I didn't want the thick frets. I didn't want it to sound like a Les Paul or a USA standard Tele, but I wanted it to sound like an old school vintage tele, with a traditional neck and stuff like that.

RS: And when you received it?

KV: I plugged it in, and WOW! Marty heard it and he was amazed, and that's hard to do, but he loved it. (RS Guitarworks also makes a Marty Stuart signature model with B Bender and I can attest that it is awesome. I own the third one ever built.)

RS: So is this the same axe we see on the TV show and on stage?

KV: Yes it is, and I was in the studio the last 2 days and used it on those sessions. I love it. The tone is very unique. We don't use a lot of equipment. We use Fender amps with reverb and tremolo, and we go after that vintage sound. We aren't going for that modern sound you hear so much today. You know, that Nashville compressed, spitty sound. We don't go after that. We strive for the classic, vintage sound. We go for the West Coast, Clarence White, Roy Nicols, James Burton sound. The new sound is fine, but just doesn't work for us.

RS: I think that's why I love the Superlatives so much. You get the classic sound. You cover a lot of great oldies and incorporate great new ones, all while capturing that classic sound traditional honky tonkers love.

KV: Yeah man, we live in our own little fantasy bubble. We do the stuff we love. We aren't concerned with getting on the radio. We make good records. Our fans love them and they support us, which lets us make another record. And we're having a blast!

RS: And that RS signature model guitar certainly helps that cause, huh?

KV: You know it man. I love it!

RS: That's so sweet that you have a signature model guitar. What is required for a guitar to wear your name?

KV: Well, obviously it has to hold up, right? It needs to be comparable to the early 50's and 60's guitars. It needs to be a beautiful guitar, look and sound great, and be a workhorse and always do what I need it to do. This guitar has been on hundreds of shows now and in hundreds of sessions, and it's never let me down.

RS: So can we expect any new projects from you in the future?

KV: Oh, absolutely. I'm always messing around with some stuff. I have Kenny Vaughan and the slo-beats stuff, and I have been sitting on a bunch of old stuff and hope to get in the studio this winter for another project.

You can find the Kenny Vaughan signature model guitar at RSguitarworks.net as well as many other classic and most excellent models they build. They are a custom shop and there is a wait list. But it is WELL WORTH THE WAIT!

Roger Sterry, resides in Ohio, Guitar enthusiast and collector, songwriter - father of 4, married to Kim, loves baseball
President/CEO PLMS, Inc.

J. Rockett Audio Designs – Tour Series!

by Eric Dahl

Like many cool music products I became aware of J. Rockett pedals from my local music store about four years ago. Chris Van Tassel and Jay Rockett launched the company in 2006, but they have gained momentum in the last five years by partnering with key players such as Guthrie Trapp, Allan Holdsworth, Josh Smith, and Tim Pierce. The pedal line was originally launched with the Pro Series, then the Signature Series was added, and now the Tour Series.

I've played the majority of their pedals and have been impressed by the build quality and sonic clarity of their effects. The Tour Series has elevated them into a new level of awareness with players thanks to their "Archer Ikon" (a Klon Clone), "Archer Over-Drive Boost," "Boing Spring Reverb," and "The Dude" (simulates a Dumble Overdrive amp). The Tour line of pedals are a much smaller footprint size wise (so they don't eat up your valuable pedal real estate) compared to their other series, but tonally they are huge!

The "Archer Ikon" is a game changer for J. Rockett and one of the founders has confided in me that they can barely keep them in stock; and after testing out a review model I can see why. It could be used as a boost pedal, but what a waste of this effect as it truly shines when you mix in the gain level, from light dirt and grit to full breakup, like a nice tube amp driven to the edge.

The "Boing Spring Reverb" provides hassle free spring reverb sounds in a small pedal that won't give you fits like the one in your amp. The Boing is great for adding some sweet reverb to your guitar solos, and I like the simplicity of a single knob!

"The Dude" is the latest release, and what a great sound to tackle, especially as the price of Dumble Amplifiers continue to climb in value to the point that average musicians can't afford them. Four knobs allow you to dial in your Level, Treble, Ratio, and Deep, and achieve the clean or dirty Dumble mojo.

What I personally like about J. Rockett Audio Designs is that they are a boutique pedal company that listens to what players want and need, and they aren't pricing their effects to the point where we can't afford them. If you're in the market for some of these tones, try them out for yourself at your local music store. If not, you can also find decent YouTube video demos of most of their effects.

The street prices for the new Tour Series releases are as follows: Archer Ikon $199, Archer Over-Drive Boost $179, Boing $159, and the Dude $199. You can also review their other offerings at their website at rockettpedals.com. We may not be able to afford some of the amps and effects our guitar hero's use, but with J. Rockett pedals we can come pretty close and still pay the mortgage!

Eric Dahl resides in Nashville TN with his wife and daughter. He is the author of "B.B. King's Lucille and the Loves Before Her" and he does a weekly TV gear review show called the FOX 17 Rock and Review.

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"Tim Pierce" - continued from page 37

nearby who are too busy to drive, so I do Skype sessions with them and it works well. That will only increase, but I do insist on the participation, and frankly I lose work because of that. A lot of people want it to be like Amazon, where you just press a button and you get the stuff delivered to you. One click. But I came from a different era. I have to have real-time approval and participation.

How many sessions do you do per day?

I try to start in the morning at 11:00. It might be two songs or five songs, but I work for six or seven hours. There are other sessions where you spend twelve hours a day, but for me, the best thing to do is work hard during the day and be free at night. I can usually finish a song in two hours if it's a lot of guitar parts. When Warren comes over, we might do five songs in two hours, because he's done all the basic guitars and he just wants me to float over it, so it can go really fast. More likely with him it's a song every half hour.

It's not a question of how many sessions for me. It's how many hours. If I go to Sunset Sound and work on a Jason Mraz record, I might be there for ten hours, but you're not working constantly, and they're doing bass and drums, so it's a different experience. I work six and seven days a week. I always end up doing a session on Saturday morning because that's when the overflow is, and people are flexible enough to come when I can see them. I'll often slip in one on Sunday too. I have phone calls out for people waiting for me to slot them in and they're willing to adapt. I'm very lucky that way. That is the great thing about having an overdub business and working at home: you don't lose work because of the scheduling. Drums and bass happen at the beginning, so the scheduling is more strict and finite. Guitar happens in the middle, so generally people are in process and they're flexible about when they can see you.

You credit your guitar teacher, Steve Maase, with whom you studied from age 12 to 14, as inspirational and influential on your playing. How much of his teaching methods and approach do you incorporate into your own?

I don't really incorporate any of his approach, partly because the people that I'm looking to teach are not at the beginning. They've played some guitar in their lives and had to put it away because they've gone on to other careers, but they have a certain amount of skill and want to expand on that. The people I seem to reach are intermediate to high intermediate to whatever my level is. They are the ones responding most on YouTube. Steve Maase taught me how to create a vocabulary. It was a brilliant thing. He took six blues licks and he would teach them one at a time. I remember them. He would have you recombine these numbered licks in different orders. That simple act was the basis of learning to improvise, and it worked very well. It's funny, after this conversation maybe I will start using, and maybe I do use, some of his techniques, and I just didn't realize it. Not only was he a great teacher, but he was also a great life coach. He kind of knew what I was going through as a 12-year-old, so I felt like I could talk to him about anything. We later became friends and played in a band together. I really couldn't have done better as a teacher, and I think everybody who studied with him felt the same way. I talked to him on the phone not long ago. He's still teaching in Albuquerque, and everybody recognizes him to be as good as it gets as a teacher.

After 35 years, how do you keep it from becoming a job? How do you remain creative and not do it by rote?

I don't really have any more "job" gigs. If a producer brings me an artist that's not the greatest, who doesn't have the greatest songs, it's not a job. It's me honoring the producer, and it's a bridge to somewhere else. The ones that are jobs I don't do anymore. It used to be that way when there was a more defined structure to studio work. Studio musicians were often virtuoso jazz players who could show up and do an amazing job on a rock or pop song, so they may have looked at it like a job. But because I grew up loving pop music that was on the radio, this is the beginning and the end for me. If you're in this business and you're paying your rent or mortgage with it, or putting your kids through school with it, you have to find a way to love the whole process. So the desire to do well for them transcends any of that cynicism.

There are sessions I turn down because they are "jobs" that I don't want to do. In the past, I probably would have taken them, but after doing this for so long, for the first time in my life I've turned down a fair amount of work for that reason. You wonder if you're being smart, but at a certain point you have to do so in order to stay happy and motivated and keep your enthusiasm for the people you care about. There are musicians I know who are much better at this than me, and musicians who turn down more than half of what they're offered for that very reason, and they're smart. You get a feeling when someone asks you to work and it doesn't feel good, and it's easy to tell them you're not available if they fall into that category. ◇

— Alison Richter

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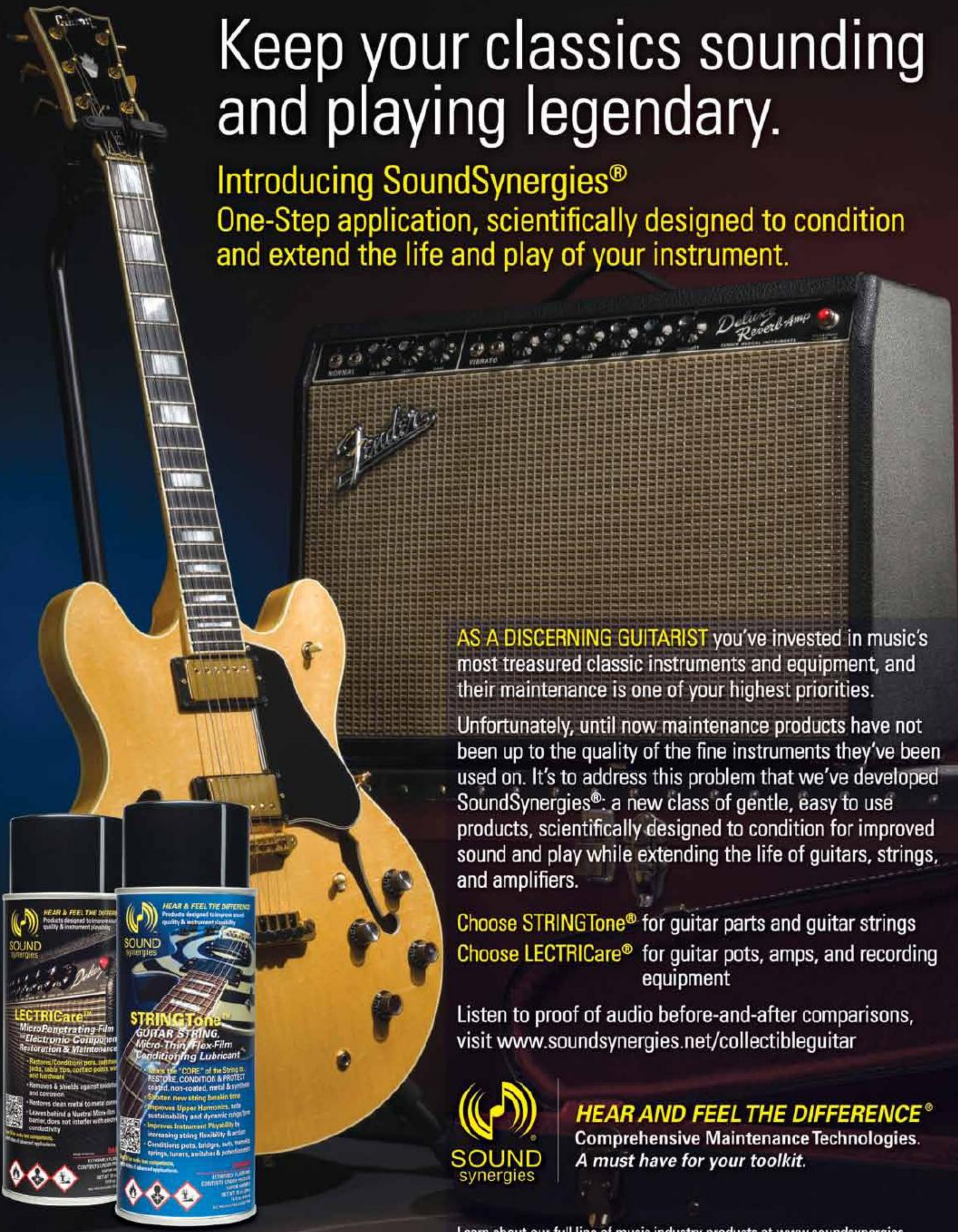

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